



JOHN MAIDMENT

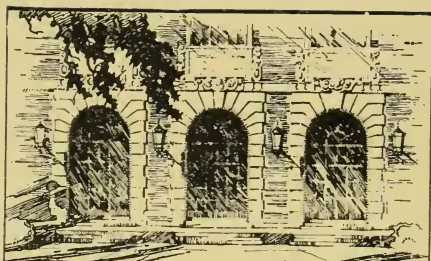
BY

JULIAN STURGIS

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JOHN MAIDMENT

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# JOHN MAIDMENT

BY

JULIAN STURGIS


IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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### III.

(*Continued.*)





## CHAPTER XVII.

Now it happened that John Maidment at his club fell in with one of those young men who represent most clearly the reaction from the languid swells of twenty years ago or more. This was a very smart and sanguine young man, who was charged with an excess of vivacity, who prided himself on being on familiar terms with all sorts of people, and called almost all his male acquaintance by their Christian names.

‘Ah, Johnny!’ he said as he pinched Maidment’s arm; ‘how goes it, and when is it to be, or are you still behaving badly?’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Johnny with a fine blush.

‘Oh, of course—yes, yes—very prudent—doosid careful!’ said the other youth. ‘Where are you going when the season’s over? Not to Boucherett, of course?’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ said John loftily, but his heart was beating. Was this outspoken person the echo of the speech of many? Was it possible that people expected this—that they had chosen him to make this imposing match? There was no girl in London of whom the world would naturally expect a more remarkable alliance. She was the striking figure of her family, and the family was one of the most powerful in England. She represented rank, and wealth, and political influence, and moreover she was beautiful. She had been so kind to him, so frank in

showing her admiration of his talent, her sympathy with his nobler views. Had she shown more than admiration, a warmer deeper sympathy? His mind ran back over their friendship; he almost heard the rustle of her gown and felt the cordial pressure of her hand. It was too early for him to go to this ball yet; he had not seen her for two days—how would she welcome him? He would mark her welcome with a newer, keener interest. If something should prevent her from coming? He began to imagine hindrances. Personal friendships or local ties might take her to some dance less famous; she might be ill; all sorts of things might have happened in two days. He blamed himself for having lost sight of her. He was almost thinking of her as if it were possible that he might win her. Of course it was out of the

question : of course, when it came to the point, she would not take him, or would not be allowed to take him. Besides, he was bound, or in some sort bound. Anyway, he need not think of it, for she would never accept him ; he would not be such a fool as to think of it. Only he was glad that they would meet that night ; it would be immensely interesting, exciting. He looked at the clock. How slow the time went ! He could not go at eleven ; he might be the first man in the room ; he must wait a little. If it were not impossible on both sides, what a striking event it would be ! How people would talk about it ! He thought that he might go now.

There were plenty of people going up the stairs when John arrived at the ball. It was one of the staircases of London, cool white marble and broad low steps, on which it was

pleasant for ladies to move upwards slowly with their plumage drawn softly after them. The lights were most becoming, the rooms large and lofty as the rooms of an Italian palace, and the handsomest women of the London world took care to wear the finest clothes and all their diamonds. It was an atmosphere which may be described as decorously intoxicating. John mounted the staircase, vivid brilliant and excited ; about him was a glow and a murmur, and before him the unknown future.

When he had reached the doorway, John stood still and looked eagerly into the room ; opposite to him was the lady who was filling his thoughts. She had come then. The long space of polished floor was empty between them, for the crowd had not come. The girl's head was turned aside, as she spoke to

the Austrian attaché, with whom she was going to dance ; she did not see John ; for a few moments he could gaze at her and wonder. She had never been so beautiful. She was almost pale ; much of her splendid colour had gone, and she looked the lovelier. She was all in white ; she was dressed more like a young girl than usual ; she was full of strength and grace, but she was certainly paler. As John stared at her, she turned her head and met his gaze ; he thought that the great dark eyes were softer. She bowed slightly, rather haughtily, but he was sure that the colour deepened as she bowed. Some feeling made him draw back ; he went out again and stood at the top of the stairs, watching the gowns come curling up, and the smiles and nods of gracious heads. As he stood musing, a lady of his acquaintance



spoke to him, and, as he answered her, he went at her elbow into the room. There she asked him a question, and then, with a light musical laugh, she said, 'You ain't listening. I see where your eyes are. I'm not a bit angry ; follow your eyes.'

'Shall I?' said John laughing, and walked across the floor. Was everybody saying the same thing? Had he given them cause to think it—given her cause? It was like fate. What a prize she looked! His thoughts were going apace as he bowed before Lady Gertrude. She was certainly different—a little prouder, a little stiller, but also a little softer. Though her words were complaining, they lacked their proper sharpness and emphasis.

'You never come to see us,' she said, 'since you became such a celebrity ; why

should you? There are so many people so much more interesting.'

John vowed that, if he did what he liked, he would come every day, every hour. She did not want to dance. There was a charming cool corner in this luxurious house, where was a palm-tree and lattice-work as oriental as the palm-tree; and several observant persons, who passed by the place, noticed that Lady Gertrude sat idle there, while a handsome and impetuous young man, whom some of them recognised as a rising member of Parliament, seemed to be speaking with an animation unusual in Englishmen. John caught a glance now and then, which was full of meaning to him, and heard a whisper and a woman's laugh. His vanity was on fire. It must be that the world thought that this fine flower was his to take or leave, as he

thought best. It must be true ; she must care for him. What other cause could there be of this new gentleness, this adorable softness of a creature so proud and splendid ? He looked at her, and she would not meet his eyes ; he leaned towards her speaking eagerly, and she was silent ; he heard his own voice full of emotion, and felt that she was moved by its music. What a prize to gain ! How men would envy the man who won her ! At the thought he looked up and saw Algy Garner stop short not twenty yards away, and glare at him with an open rage which was almost like a blow. Mr. Garner had as little concealment as a savage. He was a savage. He turned away without a nod. John looked after him, and his face was eager, radiant, triumphant ; he felt his power and the joy of the conflict.

When John woke the next morning, he asked himself if he were bound or free. Certain words which he had said to the girl just before their parting, were as clear to him as if they were written on his wall; but he could not tell how much they had meant—how much she had taken them to mean. He had no room for any other thought, and he was glad to thrust all other thoughts away. He had clean forgotten that on that morning he had intended to visit the Brents in their new home by the sea; yesterday's purpose seemed to have been no more than a passing idle fancy. There was only one thing for him to do. He must see Lady Gertrude as soon as possible. He would see at a glance, in the mere look of her greeting, how much she had taken his words to mean, or how little—whether he were still free or bound. He

half hoped that he was bound ; that at least would end all doubts and hesitations. Moreover, he foresaw, though he would not recognise the thought, that he would say to himself that he had drifted into this affair, that he had not deliberately made up his mind to transfer his affections to Lady Gertrude and to think no more of that other girl, who had been so much to him in his boyhood. Had he gone too far for going back? Was he bound? The hours seemed leaden-footed ; he could scarcely get through the day till the time came when he might call with a fair chance of finding Lady Gertrude at home.

At last the hour came. As he followed the footman upstairs, he thought that he could hear his heart beating like a drum ; he moistened his lips lest he should not be able to utter a syllable. He had to cross a long

space of noiseless carpet; the afternoon light was shaded. He saw that the girl was alone; as she rose to receive him, he looked eagerly at her face. In a moment came a great feeling of relief; she greeted him as usual. He sank into a chair, smiling, with a full sense of well-being. He was delighted that she was so large-minded, so generous, so noble. He could not see the slightest difference in her look or manner. He was sure that a meaner woman would have made him speak plainly for the satisfaction of refusing him, if not for the joy of accepting him. Would she have accepted him? He wondered and forgot to speak.

‘My mother is asleep in her den,’ said Lady Gertude; ‘they will wake her when they bring tea.’ Then she went on to talk of the trifles of the day and hour with



perhaps a little more hurry than usual, and John found himself engaged in a little five-o'clock conversation which began to irritate him. He began to think that she was a little too cool. Was it possible that her air of unconcern was neither proper pride nor generosity, but merely the result of inattention to those words of his? He had fancied that her mind had been busy with those words for the last sixteen hours; and perhaps she had scarcely noticed them. He was uneasy; his vanity was alarmed; he was sick of this chitchat. He felt that he must make her show a little consciousness that some words had passed between them, some words of more meaning than this thin society babble.

Almost before he was aware, his voice grew more tender, his talk more personal. He

drew his chair nearer ; he saw her colour deepen. Then came a pause, and then, obedient, as it seemed, to some external impulse he said, ‘Have you forgotten what I said last night?’

As the words were finished, he realised that they were the very words which he had meant not to say. He remembered that only a few minutes before he had been relieved because she seemed to have ignored his last night’s speech. There was no going back again ; he rushed on ; he was eloquent, as he could not help being ; he had not meant to do this, but he felt that he was doing it well. She made no attempt to ignore his words now ; her blush grew deeper ; she could not raise her eyes. His voice trembled ; he took her hand in both of his.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

IN London at the height of the season there are so many things of no importance which must be done, that there is little time for comfortable leisurely criticism of our neighbours' mistakes. Every day, almost every hour, brings its event, which demands a passing ejaculation, and a good lady's mouth has scarcely lost the shape of her last 'Oh!' when it has to be opened again for a new 'Ah!' While one gossip is freeing her soul of what she 'really must say' about Lady Blank's last flirtation, the other is inattentive, waiting impatiently with Miss Dashaway's last engagement on the tip of her tongue.

Thus one event drives out another, and the leaves fall so fast that the social gardeners cannot sweep them into convenient heaps. It is only in long mornings in country-houses, when the crude males are shooting, or in long twilights by the fire, when the same men are stretching their legs in the smoking-room after a day's hunting, that the women have time to review the past season, and to give to each of its events that degree of attention and criticism which is its due. Then with their delicate organs they touch and discriminate, they wonder and regret, and ever and anon some British matron of the hardier type gives a spade its real name and with it lays a fragile reputation level with the sod.

Not even the engagement of Lady Gertrude Bookham could receive its proper attention in July. Things were hurrying to a close ; girls

were counting the dances which remained to them ; young men were proposing or planning departure ; their elders, mindful of past dinners, were looking trustfully towards Hom- burg. An engagement, even the engagement of the only daughter of the House of Boucherett, could by no means be a nine days' wonder. Nine hours, and those in the minutest fragments, were all that anybody could spare to the consideration of anybody's chances of married happiness. Still a great many people in passing had a remark to make about John Maidment's luck. 'The chap hasn't a penny.' 'Hasn't he a father somewhere? Something shady, obliged to live abroad—Boulogne or somewhere. Un- common clever fellow—bound to get on.' Among politicians of all classes the engage- ment seemed to excite far more admiration

of the young member than his success as a speaker. They wagged their heads at each other, and seemed to imply that it took a born politician to be as clever as that. The event was a great deal talked about for the time of year.

If Lady Gertrude's nearest relations did not talk much more about the affair than the hurrying outside world, it is probable that they thought a great deal more. Her placid mother did not think it worth while to discuss it, because, as she frankly said, it would make her uncomfortably hot, and, when all was said, Gertrude was sure to have her own way. She did not like the marriage. The young man was poor and seemed not to belong to anyone in particular, but she did not object to him much for those reasons. It was true that in her young days



they did not marry that sort of young man ; but times were changed, and she accepted the changes and still found herself comfortable. She pronounced a deliberate opinion that her future son-in-law would get on, but she doubted if he would make a good husband. Met thereupon with emphatic assurances that John's private character was the great point in his favour, she said that she had no doubt of his virtues, but that she was not sure that she liked young men who were 'not like other young men ;' that for her part she had always rather liked other young men. Lady Gertrude was mightily indignant with her mother, and scolded her at intervals with as much effect as if she were boxing with a pillow ; Lady Whimley yielding and soon smooth again, and her daughter rather red and out of breath.

As for the Earl of Whimley and Boucherett, that magnate was quite happy when the necessary interview with the young man was over. His wife had assured him with a comfortable chuckle that it was quite impossible to request his valet, who always arranged everything so well, to receive Mr. Maidment's proposals. She was delighted; she thought that nobody but her husband was capable of such an idea; she shook with silent laughter whenever she thought of the valet. So Lord Whimley was much occupied by the necessity of seeing the young man, and of bearing himself with proper dignity during their interview. If Gertrude wanted to marry Mr. What-d'ye-call-him, there was no good making a fuss about it; he supposed that he could get his son-in-law something, though there were not so many things to be

had nowadays. He felt, however, that it was his duty to be as impressive as possible, and that there were certain things which he would be expected to say with an impressive manner. He felt that Bookham would be annoyed if he came back from the Antipodes and found that his father had not done the thing in the proper way. He slipped out and went down in a hansom to Mr. Randall, who showed no surprise, spoke well of the young man, and gave satisfaction without giving advice; by Mr. Randall he was pushed onward to the family lawyer, who suggested a few phrases, and who understood with exhilarating readiness what sort of provision should be made for the daughter of the House.

After this, Lord Whimley prepared to receive Mr. Maidment. He chose the library, for it was very dignified and rather dark.

The walls were covered with old Spanish leather, dark wood and well-bound books, relieved at intervals by rich paintings and silver sconces; the heavy carved furniture gave to its owner a comforting feeling of solidity. He stood before the great empty fireplace, and with the help of a long piece of string bore himself bravely in the contest. John behaved beautifully; he had been by no means sure that he would not be sent about his business; he was equal to either fortune; he showed most proper feeling. Lord Whimley got on capitally. The lawyer had said more than once that 'a lady in Lady Gertrude's position must live in a certain style.' The phrase was most useful, and her father insisted on the style in which Lady Gertrude must live, so amiably and so often, that John found himself graciously consenting

that his future wife should be a comparatively rich woman. Lord Whimley wrung his hand, and being by the movement reminded of his bit of string, proceeded to show him a new form of cat's-cradle ; then he recovered his dignity, and said some more of the style in which Lady Gertrude would be expected to live, venturing timidly some words about ponies. Finally, as he felt that the end was in sight and all well, he confided to his future son-in-law an amazing funny story of his own proposal to her ladyship.

John Maidment, when he had parted from Lord Whimley, perceived with wonder that his fate was sealed. He regarded himself as the victim, whether for good or for ill, of Fate. It seemed almost impossible that he, John Maidment, was about to make this marriage ; it suited him to let himself slide,

to be the victim of Fate. He was surprised to find himself so calm. His conscience scarcely made itself felt. His contact with the world, especially his daily contact with the political world, had strengthened his habit of regarding himself as far more scrupulous than his fellows. Every day he had been contrasting himself with the cynical men who played the game of politics, until he saw himself more clearly than ever as the Scrupulous Man. It was only the tenderly scrupulous man who would have doubted for a moment if he were not in some sort bound to a girl who had repulsed him. He was not afraid to think of Letty; he said to himself that it would not do to be afraid to think of Letty. He pointed out to himself that Letty had not wished to marry him; he would think no more of her; it would not be right

to think any more of her. So he determined to think about her and not to think about her; and meanwhile he thought about her. He could only keep telling himself that this thinking about Miss Brent was another proof of an over-sensitive conscience. On the whole he was calm; and, if a sudden rush of doubts came to him, he told himself how lucky he was—how much men envied him—how fine a girl he was going to marry. And the rush of all things around him helped him; it was easy to feel himself dragged into the rapids and swept along, excited, irresponsible.

John's most painful moments were those in which he composed the inevitable letter to Colonel Brent. This was his first duty; he would not shirk his duty; the Brents must not get the first news of his engagement from the *Morning Post*. He had never found such

difficulty in writing; he was discontented with the letter when it had gone; he felt sick as he opened the Colonel's answer. Colonel Brent's letter was very short.

‘I trust,’ he wrote, ‘that you will let me know if I can at any time help you in any way. I wish I could increase your allowance, but that is still impossible. We are all well, and all unite in wishing you every happiness. I hope you will be a kind husband. I think that women cannot stand unkindness as we can.’

There was very little more than this, and John, though he was a little impatient of this extreme continence, was relieved.

‘We are all well, and all unite in wishing you every happiness.’

So Letty knew, and she was well, and she wished him joy.



The next post proved to him that he had not decided too quickly; it brought a few lines from Letty herself—a few commonplace lines.

‘I thought that I must write myself,’ her brief note said: ‘I do wish you joy with all my heart.’

‘With all my heart!’ John found the words coming back to him with irritating persistence, as he walked the streets. He went every day to visit Lady Gertrude, but to-day, though he was on his way to her feet, he walked down a great many streets, which did not lead directly to her abode. He told himself that he wanted exercise. Finally he turned into his club; he had remembered that he must answer some notes of congratulation.

In the club, which was kept in a cool and decorous twilight, he was sitting with his

hat on, staring at the empty grate, with a sheet of note-paper before him, when he heard a fragment of talk.

‘What does she want to go and marry a beastly Radical for?’ asked somebody.

‘My good chap,’ said another young man, who was well-informed, ‘he has only got to skip across the floor; it’s as easy as lying. I happen to know it’s as good as settled. He is to go over on his wedding-day, and to stand at the next election as Conservative candidate for the county with Bookham.’

‘Well, I always heard he was a beastly Radical,’ said the first speaker, who had a good piece of obstinacy in him.

‘Ah, you hear a lot, old chap; you have all the best information, and you are always broke. You are one of the knows—and wouldn’t you be a Radical, or a sweep, or a

Turk, or anything else if it would help you to an heiress?’

‘Indeed I would,’ said the obstinate one relenting.

John heard the door swing as the two youths departed, but he still sat gnawing his thumb and frowning. What right had anybody to say that he was going to leave his party? And for such reasons! That is what the world would say if he were to—— How infernally stupid people were! Against stupidity, as someone had said, even the gods fight in vain. The fact that his wife belonged to a Tory family would have nothing whatever to do with it, if he ever should—— Were there not reasons enough for leaving the Liberal party? They were full of fine professions and effected nothing, spendthrift with economy in their mouths,

blood-guilty and crying peace, peace! interpreting the cause of the people as the art of coaxing voters. There were a thousand good reasons why an honest man (and he was at least an honest man) should leave the Liberal camp—a camp of peace-professors. It was irritating beyond endurance to think that, if he should ever be driven to leave his party, stupid dunderheads would see no reason for his action but his alliance with the House of Boucherett. Alas! that people were so stupid—so cynical—so sure to see no motives but the basest. John, as he got up without having written a line, declared to himself that he needed no alliance to insure his success; that he could do well enough without the Boucherett interest. He looked at his watch, saw that Lady Gertrude had been expecting him for the last half hour, and so dashed out of doors and hailed a hansom.

# IV.



## CHAPTER XIX.

MORE than a year had passed since John Maidment's marriage. Another season was dead, with its rush, roar, and restlessness; another session had gone with its nights of poured-forth repetitions and its little burden of doubtful legislation. John had been more quiet in the House, but, when he uttered, he had appeared for the most part as searching critic of Government measures; and it was now generally believed that he would offer himself as a Conservative at the next Election. If the Reform Bill, which had been so long looming, were passed before

the Election, the little domestic borough which he represented would be a defunct abuse; but, whether it were defunct or no, he had made up his mind to stand for another place. He thought that he would be happier, stronger, and more free when he owed nothing to the Brents. He had heard very little of or from them since his marriage; he persuaded himself to feel aggrieved by their silence. He seemed to himself to have had no rest, no time for rest in the last twelve months. Besides Parliamentary duties there had been house-hunting and furniture-hunting, occupations dear to the busy mind of his wife; there had been dinners innumerable given in honour of the married Lady Gertrude, and balls and parties; and then had followed country-house visits to several influential relations



and a longer sojourn at Boucherett. John was sick of it all, and had assured himself again and again that all would be well when they were settled in their new house.

But somehow the time of needed repose did not seem to have come. Not colours chosen and harmonised by the last fashionable gentleman-decorator, not sofas stuffed with the most delicate down of the most expensive furnisher, could insure that rest which John knew yesterday. Something was wrong with him ; he became so easily irritable.

John Maidment sat struggling with a Blue-book and with incipient irritability. He sat at the writing-table in the back drawing-room with a sheet of foolscap by the side of the Blue-book, and, when he lifted his eyes, they rested on and found no

relief in a blank dirty-white wall to which a piece of bedraggled ivy hung by a rusty nail. The house was in an admirable neighbourhood, and some sacrifice of space and air had been found necessary ; so many people wished to live there ; the houses seemed to have been fitted together like a puzzle. John felt himself cramped. He would have worked in his own den, but that tiny apartment was lower down in a sort of dry well, and at this winter season but little light crept down to its window, which was half-filled with unpleasant coloured glass. So he sat in the back drawing-room trying to fix his mind on a young diplomatist's report on the condition of Small Proprietors near Naples, acutely conscious of his wife's movements, and in each interval of silence expecting her next sound.

Lady Gertrude had settled herself with the pronounced intention of working without a break and in perfect silence at a vast piece of artistic needlework ; and yet but a short time had elapsed when John heard her rustling quickly across the room. Then he could hear her reseal herself with a great sigh, and almost immediately she was up again and bustling across the room. Instead of making calculations about olive-trees and acres, rough manners and full pockets, John could not help wondering what his wife was doing. Why should she move in such a hurry ? And surely her clothes made more noise than any other woman's. She sighed again ; she wriggled her broad shoulders over her work ; her chair squeaked and she answered it with a petulant exclamation. Presently she

moved to another chair, which was nearer to her husband's back, and sighed. This sigh was so aggressive that John felt obliged to say, 'What's the matter?'

He did not turn round, but his wife accepted the words as an opening.

'Nothing, dear,' she said; 'I only wanted to know what night we should ask the Martyn Lawlers. You know who *she* is—the daughter of Aunt Maria. She has copied my gown.'

She gave a little laugh which seemed to ask if he did not think that amazing. John, however, made no sign.

'I don't mind,' she continued; 'why should *I* mind? *I* don't care about dress; I am perfectly indifferent to Society. But it is funny. It is the only one of my gowns which I got from Paris, and she has copied

it before I have even had a chance of wearing it. Of course she pretends it isn't a bit like, but that's too absurd.'

Here she gave another short laugh with more scorn in it.

'Would you very much mind telling me what night I shall ask the Lawlers?' she asked after a pause.

'Whenever you like,' said John, and he turned a page of his Blue-book.

She moved her shoulders, coughed, sighed twice, and presently was impelled to ask, 'What are you working at?'

'Politics.'

'I really do think,' she said plaintively, 'that you might sometimes talk politics with me. Of course I am a woman and not worth consulting; but people did ask my advice before I married. Mr. Randall—and

I suppose you will allow that *he* knew something about politics—used *often* to ask my opinion. Mr. Randall——’

‘Hang Mr. Randall!’ cried John jumping up. ‘I wish to heaven you’d remember that one must sometimes think of something more important than your Lawlers and your Aunt Maria and——’

He was walking up and down the room, but she sat still. Her eyes were pink, and so was her nose; it was only pride which kept her tears from flowing. She was not looking handsome; she looked a little too large for that moderate house. John had already offended her deeply on one occasion by hinting that perhaps she ate too much. She was much aggrieved now.

‘I dare say you talk politics with Susan Lulham,’ she said with point.

John gave an angry exclamation and dashed out of the room. He walked very fast in the street; he declared that his home was intolerable; he asked himself what he had done to deserve a nagging wife. He had married with such good intentions; he was so anxious to be a good husband; he knew that he was made to shine in domestic life; but he declared to himself that Gertrude would not give him a chance. She would not let him alone; she would fuss about; she seemed to have no idea that she had married a man whose duty it was to think, who must have time and silence—other people's silence. She placed him in such a ridiculous position, when he was compelled to insist upon the importance of his thoughts. She was always holding up Randall to him, as if he must needs confess that he was a

smaller man than Randall. However that might be, his own wife ought not to think him a smaller man. She bragged about him to outsiders in a way which was almost ridiculous, and yet she showed him that as a matter-of-course she held other men his betters. 'I do wish,' said John as he hurried along the pavement, 'that she had more moderation, more tact, more taste.'

It was some consolation to be sure that when he and his wife disagreed it was always her fault; but still it was very hard upon him. Of course she was fond of him, very fond of him, but even that had its inconvenient side—she had already shown symptoms of the most preposterous jealousy. When he was bothering himself, as so sensitive a man must (John confessed the necessity with a sigh), about some trifling point in



this conduct, she was sure to begin asking questions with an aggravating transparent carelessness about the entire Brent family, and expressing her wonder that her husband's nearest friends showed so little desire to know her better. She made a grievance of the coolness of the Brent family, as she would have made an equally useful grievance out of any eagerness to secure the advantages of a connection with Boucherett. While her husband sat behind his paper or bent over his writing-table, she would pass from the Brent family to the sole daughter of the House, and appeal to John for confirmation of her fancy portrait of Miss Letitia, as she called her. This was very unpleasant to John. Lately she had introduced more often the name of another lady, and with more direct aggravation had sniffed and

laughed over her husband's liking for that middle-aged and sickly widow, Mrs. Lulham. She had begged men in John's presence to explain to her the great attraction of Mrs. Lulham. She was confident—and here she was right—that he would rather talk politics with Susan Lulham than with her.

John had said to himself again and again since his marriage that his wife had been spoiled. He was vastly indignant with the snobbishness and frivolity of clever men, who had listened with deference to the views of Lady Gertrude Bookham because she belonged to an important family or because she was a handsome woman. He knew that these men must have known that some of her opinions were absurd, and others mere echoes of those of the party leaders who frequented her father's house—that her political creed

taken as a whole was a mass of inconsistencies.

And now the punishment, which should fall upon those flattering worldlings, fell on the lady's husband. Because he would not pretend to consult her on the affairs of the nation she was aggrieved, and he knew that she would be always aggrieved. John said to himself that it must be so—that he would not pretend to think her political opinions worth discussing. It was comfort to him to determine that he would be honest; and it removed from his forebodings of the future the dismal nightmare of long sham discussions, from which he could derive no profit.

John walked and walked till his mind grew more easy, and he began to think of his wife with a kinder feeling. At last he almost smiled as he pictured her enjoying a

good cry. She was sure to have had a good cry, to have felt better, to have rung for a cup of tea. The thought of a cup of tea struck the young man as pleasant, and he looked about him to see where he was. It was certain that Lady Gertrude had finished her consoling cup, but he had walked so far from home that, if he turned leftward a little towards the river, he would come to Mrs. Lulham's house. Mrs. Lulham had excellent tea, which was sent to her by a Russian friend, whose name she never mentioned ; but if the friend was questionable, the tea was above criticism, and the thought of it carried John a little further from home to that small drawing-room, where he found most delicate tea and a flattery of a somewhat coarser flavour.

## CHAPTER XX.

To make an impression was the breath of life to Mrs. Lulham. She had never been beautiful; she had been young but for a moment; she had never been strong nor well; she had always been interesting. To be interesting was the one interest of her life. Her husband had been an episode; she had had no child; but there had always been some man or some woman whose thoughts were full of her. There had been more men than women. She grew tired of this or that one or they were tired of her, but there were always others who were attracted in turn; and the frequent changes

were saved from a too crude appearance by her frequent changes of abode. As the wife of a good-looking colourless Secretary of Legation, she had visited many climates and found them all disagree with her ; and since she had cremated her husband, she had wandered to please herself, a very Ulysses for travel and a Circe for wiles. She had listened to the theosophist in the East Indies and to the obeah-man in the West ; wherever she went she had kept about her a peculiar atmosphere compounded of mystery and the sick-room, which had drawn many people to her. Unusual people came to her—fashionable women grown weary of leaving cards ; politicians with plans for the future of Constantinople and of Jerusalem ; parsons in search of the lost tribes ; the thought-reader ; the healer by blue glass ; the healer by faith ;

journalists with a good deal of leisure ; novelists who appealed to the cultured few ; the unacted dramatist and the unappreciated actor ; the soprano in search of an engagement ; a small army of reciters who were always ready to leap up and begin ; and, when she was in England, a little string of foreigners with hungry faces and cigarettes. She adored cigarettes and smoked incessantly by the advice of her doctor. She attracted men and women, but more men than women ; she was a mistress of the art of flattery, measuring her doses like a skilful salad-maker and prodigal with the oil.

Mrs. Lulham lay on the sofa in her small drawing-room, with the last pamphlet on Buddha and the last realistic novel from Paris. The tea-table was before her and the tea had just been made. To some, who had

been disappointed in her, she might have suggested a small spider, rather bloated, motionless in the centre of her web; but to those immediately interested there was something strangely significant in the direct grave gaze of the round brown eyes, which stared at nothing visible. A delicate faint smoke floated around her head. She seemed as one who awaited a summons. The two young men who were present were of the immediately interested; they respected her impressive stillness; they conversed together in whispers. And they too were interesting. The taller of the two, Conrad Typekins, was a socialist and a designer of mantel-pieces. He was tall and slim, with thin brightly-coloured cheeks. His features were small and neat, and there was pert independence about his mouth; his hair was longer than



the fashionable length ; his eyes were calm and defensive. He was obliged to watch his own manner in the presence of those who might forget that they received a favour in being allowed to buy his little shelves and brackets. He calmly awaited the time when no private citizen would be able to have a mantel-piece of his own, but in the meantime his little heart was glad in secret that in his brief day there were still luxurious homes, where he might be asked to dine with his back to his own design, and be easy in bearing and loftily tolerant of surprised millionaires. The friend who whispered to Conrad so eagerly was a soft meek-looking youth, with flaxen down upon his chin and a lisping speech, which he had adopted as more pleasing than his native cockney. Basil Gustard was a poet, precious and passionate. His poems

were extremely erotic; he seemed to have acquired a faint permanent blush from the perusal of them. Lispings and whisperings, Mr. Gustard spoke eagerly to Mr. Typekins, and both young men glanced ever and anon at their hostess, who sat like a priestess with the faint smoke about her, rapt, contemplative, waiting.

If the priestess was waiting for something, it seemed that on this occasion at least it was for something tangible, for the set face relaxed into a smile as the little parlour-maid brought in the cake, which she had fetched from the shop at the corner. But the lady's face was solemn again when a minute later John Maidment entered.

‘I knew that you would come,’ she said. She had not been so sure of the cake, for the confectioner had been rather impertinent of

late. 'I always feel your coming,' she said to John, as she held his hand.

John was pleased. The welcome was soothing; the tea was not yet bitter; he was the most important male. The other young men admired Mr. Maidment; they admired him as artists; they knew that he had had a success with the press and with the public. They would not have confessed how they would have enjoyed a success with the public and the press—how they would have enjoyed despising it. To Typekins, moreover, Boucherett had long seemed a splendid setting for one of his mantel-pieces; he had pictured himself at Boucherett with his masterpiece among masterpieces, artist and work alike polished and alike admired, educating the taste of the barbarian, tolerant of surrounding dukes. As for Basil Gustard, for whom

history began and ended with Mary Queen of Scots, he spoke of John behind his back with rapture, and with his own special talent for the inappropriate had named him 'Chastelard.' Conrad with open fearless looks, Basil with furtive glances, admired John Maidment, as he sipped the delicious Caravan tea; and then they listened with joy while he talked, and the little sphinx on the sofa sat smiling, musing, ineffable. All the talk seemed to mean a vast deal more than it could mean; every word was more interesting than it had ever been before. Time flew so fast that John broke short off in his speech, astonished by the clock, which even in that atmosphere was keeping the commonplace time of prosaic accurate Greenwich. He perceived with amazement that he must hurry

home if he would not keep Lady Gertrude waiting for dinner.

John had been soothed and comforted. As he walked towards home, he grew warm and hopeful. He thought of his wife awaiting him, and it seemed easy to be tolerant of her small weaknesses and grateful for her deep affection. He saw her with his mind's eye glowing and dressed with modest richness for their little dinner of two ; he enjoyed by anticipation the comfortable dining-room with the glowing fire, and enjoyed too the thought that he might use coal freely without considering the cost. It was no small matter to have a wife who was naturally sumptuous and could afford to be sumptuous ; he determined to be very kind and very considerate. He impulsively

hailed a hansom lest he should keep her waiting for dinner.

John let himself into his house and was struck in a moment with a sense of desolation. There was no light in the dining-room, into which he advanced cautiously that he might ring the bell. His servant appeared with an air of polite surprise. Her ladyship had gone to a meeting for the friendless window-cleaners; she had left no message.

Was anyone ever so uncomfortably charitable? If his man had not been so extremely gentlemanlike, John would have expressed aloud his contempt for the distressed window-cleaners. He was sure that his wife would be a bore at the meeting, would ask unnecessary questions with the solemn over-businesslike air of a woman transacting

business, and would be aggrieved at not receiving enough attention. John was annoyed.

‘I suppose I can have some dinner?’ he said.

‘There were no orders, sir. I’ll ask the cook.’

In a minute the admirable domestic returned. ‘Mrs. Cantle says, sir, that her ladyship supposed that of course you knew it was her ladyship’s night for the distressed window-cleaners; and her ladyship didn’t leave no orders for any dinner, supposing that you would dine at the club.’

John had not taken off his hat; he hurried out, found another hansom and went with much annoyance to dine at his club.

John was lingering over his solitary dinner when he saw Mr. Fisher coming towards him. Mr. Fisher was very polite to John. He was editor of a new and original weekly review, and he kept an eye and a genial smile on rising talent. This broad smile and an air of candid admiration did wonders for Mr. Fisher. He was not a great man, but he had a keen eye for those who might be great; he had become prominent by detecting the promise of prominence in others. He seemed to say, 'I am a simple fellow, and, when I see an admirable piece of work, I blurt out my admiration of its author. I am sure we should suit each other. You must do something for my paper some day.' Now he came and sat by John's side and encouraged him to talk, and when he saw his mouth opening, he looked



at him with a broad smile of expectation. John began to feel better.

‘You are going to do nothing this evening,’ said Mr. Fisher with confidence; ‘come with me to Mrs. Lulham’s.’

It was a coincidence; John was tempted. It had been very pleasant in the afternoon; why should he not go back? He remembered that his wife did not like Mrs. Lulham; she would not be pleased at his visiting that lady twice in one day. She had provided nothing for him; she had cut him adrift for the evening; why should he not go where he could find amusement—harmless amusement?

While these thoughts were flying, he rather lamely observed that he was not dressed.

‘She cares for none of those things,’ said Mr. Fisher; ‘she is at home in the Conti-

mental fashion, in the evening, to all sorts of coats.' He laughed aloud. 'Come,' he said, 'and sit at her feet with me!' He had the air of a genial uncle offering a treat. He passed his arm through John's, as if he were hooking a shy contributor, and the young man allowed himself to be led away.

## CHAPTER XXI.

It is not always wise to try to repeat an agreeable experience. Not three hours had passed, but in three hours how many changes may not an imaginative female in delicate health undergo? It was a different Mrs. Lulham who received John Maidment after his short absence. She was not surprised (it is not the way of sphinxes); it was her mission to surprise. But she did not show enough pleasure at seeing him again, and the young man was chilled; there was a slight restlessness in her, and a tendency to paradox. Perhaps she was tired of Mr. Fisher, who had

been pressing her hand for twelve months past, and assuring her in a low tone that she must write something for him. She had been much tempted by this prospect; she was dying to publish a series of papers on all sorts of things with a peculiar signature. She was beginning to doubt if this frank admiring editor would ever come from general protestations to a particular engagement—to a date for commencement and an offer of money. Perhaps she was tired of Mr. Fisher; perhaps she thought that Mr. Maidment, who really interested her, would grow tired of her too soon if he came too often. She was restless, and twice as mysterious as ever.

John was not amused, and began to wish that he had not made this second visit. He was doing a thing which his wife would dislike very much, if she knew about it, and

the thing was not amusing. He was standing near one of the two narrow windows, when a brougham was pulled up short a few doors off and he saw a man get out. At the same moment he felt the little brown hand of his hostess clutch his arm.

‘Quick!’ she cried, ‘hide yourself; I implore you; if you love me!’

Even while she cried out she had seized with her other hand the coat-sleeve of Mr. Fisher, and the two men yielding gracefully to excessive weakness allowed themselves to be thrust into the little back drawing-room. With nervous haste the impulsive lady pulled the folding-doors together, and left her guests in darkness. John was not at all amused.

‘Preposterous antics!’ he muttered between his teeth, and he kicked away a stool, over which he had stumbled; he felt as if he

were treated like a fool. Mr. Fisher was smiling more widely than ever; he meant to convey that he was a good fellow, a man of the world who was not to be put out by trifles, and generally that he found the world satisfactory; he meant to express a great deal by that smile, but he forgot that he was smiling in the dark. So true it is that even the wisest of men are to some extent creatures of habit. There was a step on the stairs, the noise of a door, and then the door which opened from the place of captivity on to the landing was cautiously opened, and Mrs. Lulham's own maid appeared. This maid spoke little of any known language; she was suspected of being something Slavonic. Basil Gustard had darkly hinted that it was a man disguised on account of political eccentricities. It seemed to have a faint odour of dynamite.

Whatever it was, it was more mysterious than its mistress. The swarthy fat face, illumined by a flickering flat candle, was full of expression, and the dirty beckoning finger was most authoritative. John obeyed with a contemptuous ‘pish,’ and Mr. Fisher brought his smile out into the faint light of the staircase.

In a house where the postman leaves a letter from the Himalayas, and a prophet takes by mistake a conspirator’s umbrella, it is only natural that the occasional dustpan should be left on the stairs. John, made careless by annoyance, stepped in the dustpan, stumbled, hit the being who was their guide in the broad back and sent the candlestick flying. A parrot shrieked from under the stairs at the new darkness ; an object leapt from under John’s feet, possibly the cat,

perhaps a familiar spirit. John gave a ridiculous start, caught at the banister and twisted his wrist, and uttered a sharp exclamation as he arrived with a run in the narrow hall. The possible Bulgar now relighted the candle, and as its feeble ray fell on the umbrella-stand, Mr. Fisher began to stare at it with a face full of meaning.

When they were in the street, Mr. Fisher pressed John's arm affectionately. 'Did you see the umbrella?' he asked with a smile full of wide knowledge; 'it was Simpson's; I know its onyx top.'

'I dare say,' said John crossly.

'I know it,' said Mr. Fisher; 'it is the smartest umbrella in London.'

'Simpson is there, if that is what you want to get at. I saw him.'

'You saw him!' cried Mr. Fisher stand-



ing still to express his great surprise. ‘How? where? how wonderful!’ He stared with admiration illuminating his face, which was further lighted by a street lamp.

John was better pleased. ‘I saw him from the window,’ he said.

‘Nothing escapes you,’ said his friend loudly, ‘nothing;’ and he continued to look at Mr. Maidment as if he were learning an invaluable lesson.

‘Why under heaven,’ cried John, growing rapidly hot again, ‘are we to be hustled out of the way of Mr. Simpson? Has she such an admiration for Mr. Simpson?’

‘He is a Cabinet Minister.’

‘He is a time-serving rascal.’

‘Have you never observed?’ said Mr. Fisher ignoring this dangerous calling of names, ‘have you never observed—of course

you have—that even the cleverest women attach immense importance to a Cabinet Minister? It's like the servant girls—it's the uniform—when they have once seen the gold stripe down the trowsers—you'll find it so yourself. It won't be long before you find the power of the gold stripe down the trowsers.'

John could not help a reluctant smile; it was pleasant to hear such a prophecy from a man who certainly had a wide acquaintance with successful men. John had been standing still since Mr. Fisher first arrested his steps, and they had got no further from the house than the corner of the next street, when they came face to face with a man whom they both recognised in the moment of passing. Indeed he was a remarkable person. His jet black hair, thin pale cheeks and finely cut

features made him romantic as the first independent drawing of a school-girl, and it was a well-known fact that, though an Irish patriot, he had refused a large gift of money collected for his comfort from the poorest peasantry in the world. This enthusiast paid no attention to the people whom he met in the street; he strode forward muttering to himself, and John and Mr. Fisher saw him stop at Mrs. Lulham's door, and without one look behind, enter that suspicious abode. John was furious. To have been hustled out of a house that a Cabinet Minister might have a secret interview with a man whom he and his colleagues loftily denounced from their majestic bench! And what made it most bitter was, that this Minister was of all Ministers the one who exasperated him most. Mr. Simpson displayed in his face a very

unusual combination of self-sufficiency and resolution. He had the nose of a pampered toy-terrier and the chin of a bull-dog. He was like a weasel for sharpness and tenacity, agile in movement and untiring in pursuit, following his object as a weasel follows a rabbit in a warren, through any number of dark devious ways. Mr. Simpson had offended John Maidment by his mere appearance, and, though he had not come into collision with him, the offence had deepened. Of all the prominent politicians this was the one with whom John foresaw that he would have the bitterest struggles. He was confident that he would be stronger in argument and immeasurably superior in eloquence (for he held the speaking of Mr. Simpson to be bald and common as the speaking of a dexterous vestryman); but he

had a presentiment that this peak-nosed politician would be slow to know that he was beaten, would be eternally confident, would shift his ground and say that he had not, and would appeal powerfully to the average House of Commons people by personal attacks and commonplace jests. The horn of the rhinoceros is strong though not elegant, and his hide would make a candidate eligible for any constituency.

John could keep silence no longer; he began to pour forth his indignation. He recalled with ardour how, at a recent meeting, this very Simpson had repudiated with excessive mockery the idea that Her Majesty's Government would hold any intercourse, other than open debate in Parliament, with the Irish party; and now here he was closeted in a little bureau of intrigue with

the most violent and least loyal of contemporary Irishmen. John was warm and eloquent, walking and talking as if one were not more difficult than the other, and the appreciative Fisher heard him with delight. The young member rose from this incident of the night to the general question of political morality; and he spoke brilliantly, as he had spoken before upon this subject, on the awful contrast between public profession and private conduct, on the hypocrisy and cynicism and the disgust which they could not but excite in the young, the generous, and the true.

When he had finished, Mr. Fisher seized his hand and held it hard. 'Why don't you do an article for me?' he said with zeal.

John gave a little laugh, as if he would put the suggestion aside. 'It would not do for me to appear in such a thing,' he said.

‘But you need not appear. You could assume a name—a nom de plume—it’s done every day. There is nobody I would sooner ask. It is a good work, a great public duty to show up Simpson.’

‘It is not Simpson only, he is nothing : it is a wide and a spreading evil.’

‘Precisely,’ cried Fisher with expanding admiration ; ‘precisely ! But Simpson must be used as a type, and attacked as a type. It would be immense. No man living could do it so well as you.’

It was impossible not to smile, impossible not to be gratified by so bold a statement from this amateur of able men. John smiled, but he shook his head.

‘I shall expect it,’ said Mr. Fisher. ‘You ought to do it ; it is the obvious thing for

you to do; it would be worthy of you. Mind! I shall expect it.'

He pressed the young orator's hand in both of his, hailed a passing hansom, and gave the address of an archbishop.

'No, no,' said John as he turned away, but he was still smiling. He thought that it was true indeed that he could do it better than most men—if only it were right that he should do it at all—but he would think no more of it, it would not do. He stepped out briskly homeward.

John Maidment's mind was one of those active machines which, when a tempting subject is brought before them, begin to work of themselves, and to turn out appropriate phrases. John had said to himself that he would think no more of the proposed philippic against Simpson, and yet,



as his feet trod the pavement, so easily and rhythmically did sentences come tripping to his tongue. If he cared to do such a job, it would be effective to write this and that and the other. He smiled as pertinent words came to him in quick succession, and now and then an epigram; he laughed aloud at the thought that here at least was something which would make even the rhinoceros-hided Simpson feel.

When John awoke the next morning, he began at once to recall the words and sentences which had seemed so effective, and to consider if they still impressed him favourably. The subject had taken hold of him, and would not let him go, though he laughed and told himself that he played with it. He looked at it as good mental exercise, which would have no tangible result; it was amusing to plan this crushing attack which

would never be made. After breakfast he shut himself into his little dim den and began to write quickly. It seemed a pity not to jot down the most effective of these sentences, which had seemed to spring up of themselves. He thought that he could dismiss them from his mind when he had put them in his drawer; they really were too good to be lost; they really did seem to him amazingly pungent and scathing. He would write them out and think no more of them. Two hours later John was writing rapidly. His pen seemed to fly, and on the floor beside him was a growing heap of foolscap pages. He had not a moment for thinking what he should do with his morning's work; the sentences were formed more quickly than he could write them, and he was swept along with great excitement, feeling that he was doing a thing superlatively well.

Meanwhile, Lady Gertrude had had a most cheerful interview with her cook, and was bustling about upstairs with abundant appreciation of the pleasures of life. She had quickly repented of her conduct of the day before, and had spent a most uncomfortable evening, irritated by the lady friends of the friendless window-cleaners, and by visions of her poor husband in a dismal home and with no dinner ordered. She had expected sharp words when she came home and expected them again in the morning; but her husband had been kind. She was very happy, and was convinced that she had a husband of a generous and noble nature.

## CHAPTER XXII.

It was lucky for Lady Gertrude Maidment that she had a hearty temperament and a happy power of rebounding. She was very much in love with her husband, and at moments when all things smiled she felt the same abundant belief in him. But her unquestioning faith had become a mood of moments; she was too often fretful about him, uneasy about what he would do or say next. She had complained of him often to her placid mother, and been angry with her for not defending him warmly; she had complained even to her intimate friends, though from no one of them would she accept the

slightest criticism of his conduct. She was disappointed.

It was no new thing for Lady Gertrude to be disappointed. She had enjoyed a thousand disappointments; but this was the most bitter of all, and she got the least enjoyment out of it. She had been so gloriously confident, when she married John Maidment, that the disappointments of life were at an end. Many things had refused to adapt themselves to her wishes when she was a girl, and she had affirmed a thousand times that nothing ever went right. But marriage was to change all that. She was going to marry a perfect husband, whom she adored. She displayed him with the more ample pride, because some people might dare to suppose that she was making a poor marriage; she was half worshipper, half great discoverer.

She thought that she had discovered this brilliant being outside her world ; she felt herself a female Columbus. She had placed her husband on a pedestal, and prepared to burn incense before him in the presence of all individuals of the Boucherett set. She had intended without one moment's doubt to have done with disappointments for life. But her good intentions had gone the old way. As in former days the important man would refuse the invitation to dinner ; as the young person of talent would show the basest ingratitude ; as the venerable-seeming pauper in the village would be overheard using the least agreeable language ; so in these early days of Lady Gertrude's married life did the husband whom she had chosen refuse to be in all respects the ideal husband whom she had intended to exalt.

She was aggrieved more and more often. She had meant to be his true helper, and he would have none of her help in his life's work. He answered shortly or in a bored tone ; or he went away. He went away too often. This was not the life-union of which she had dreamed. Was she to be no more than the occasional companion of his lighter hours—she who had always been held so clever—she who had been so often consulted by wise men? John seemed to take it as a matter of course that she should have no share in his serious work ; this made her jump with aggravation. But there was something below this, an irritating cause which she would not drag to the light and look at, and this was the growing consciousness that her husband's love for her was much less than hers for him.

It must not be supposed that Lady Gertrude blamed her lord and did not blame herself. She was accustomed to blame herself. She had a high ideal of wifely duty. She had always had high ideals, but she had acquired long ago a comforting belief that one of course fell short of high ideals. 'Of course one must fall short,' she said to herself. So she blamed herself for finding fault with her husband, for her impatience and her occasional fretfulness ; but she did not blame herself much. It was very hard that her married life would not run as she had meant it to run ; it was part of the general aggravation of things ; she was sure that other women were not so tormented.

It was after luncheon, and Lady Gertrude had ascended to her drawing-room in a very virtuous state of mind. She bustled



about, getting rid of some superfluous vitality and making yet another rearrangement of the furniture, and then she seated herself on the music-stool, which seemed a little overburdened with her and her conscience, and began to play and to sing not very inaccurately with her big contralto voice. This conscientious performance was interrupted by the announcement and entry, as of the sun-god beaming, of Mr. Fisher. The sight of Mr. Fisher reminded the lady of something which she had taken to herself as a grievance, and she bounced off the music-stool. She was eager to welcome and to scold her guest.

‘Oh, Mr. Fisher,’ she cried, ‘I have a most dreadful bone to pick with you!’

‘Any bone,’ said Mr. Fisher with ready gallantry, ‘which I may share with Lady

Gertrude Maidment will be a treat to me. Better a bone with Lady Gertrude than a stalled ox and other people therewith.'

He laid his hat on his heart before he deposited it on the table, and smiled. He had expressed much admiration in his time for this opulent lady, whom he had admired largely in her splendid home of former days. He had taken with him to Boucherett the very best butter, and had been introduced in return (to carry on the same agricultural metaphor) to some of the finest cheeses; he had tasted with gusto the rich compliments with which he had regaled the daughter of the House; and he had been asked to meet and to express his approval of many notable personages. Boucherett had been often in the smiling mouth of Mr. Fisher, and he now gazed at its fairest flower with an air

of frank expectation of something unusually good.

Lady Gertrude was fussing among the reviews and pamphlets on the table, and she presently arose in triumph with the new number of her visitor's popular periodical.

‘You ought to be ashamed of yourself,’ she said, and Mr. Fisher pretended to hide his face. ‘It’s a most disgraceful article,’ she continued less playfully. ‘I can’t imagine how you can bring yourself to put such a thing in your magazine.’

‘Dear, dear, dear! What article in my poor weekly has had the misfortune to offend Lady Gertrude Maidment?’

She held the book open before him and said, ‘You know perfectly well what I mean: What could I mean except this horrid attack on Mr. Simpson?’

Mr. Fisher burst out laughing as if she had been irresistibly humorous: he really thought that she had made a joke.

‘I am not laughing at all,’ said the lady emphatically; ‘it is a horrid article, horrid and personal, and in the very worst taste. Of course I do not agree with anything which Mr. Simpson says, but that’s *no* reason why I should like to see him attacked in this disgraceful way.’

By this time the editor was regarding her with a very blank look. He was almost dismayed.

‘Who is this “Martin Johnson,”’ asked the lady with her rosy finger on the page, ‘who puts his name to such stuff?’

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Fisher, with his slyest and his most deprecating air, ‘ah!’ and he shook his head.

He was good-natured and he was really very sorry. He saw that it would be a monstrous pity if a trifle were to disturb so excellent and harmonious arrangement as this Maidment marriage. He delighted in harmonious arrangements; he had been warming himself at this successful alliance of unusual ability with wealth and race and beauty. Carefully and tenderly but soon with growing warmth he began to defend the unlucky article. He quoted the opinion of Lord This, and Mr. That, and he ended by saying that the paper had had an immense success and that everybody was talking about it.

But Lady Gertrude would not be converted.

‘I particularly dislike that sort of thing,’ she said. ‘I can’t understand why people are

allowed to attack a man's private life and habits just because he happens to be in a public position. It's the *very* thing which people were always abusing in Americans — only of course nowadays nobody abuses Americans for anything ; one is nothing unless one is American.'

This seemed as if it would introduce another grievance — a very little one — of Lady Gertrude's, but Mr. Fisher thought it wiser not to prolong the interview. 'Is Mr. Maidment at home?' he asked, 'and can I see him?'

'Oh yes,' she said, and rang the bell and told the servant to let Mr. Maidment know that Mr. Fisher was there.

After a minute the servant returned and said that Mr. Maidment had gone out.

'Gone out!' cried Lady Gertrude sharply,

and almost before the door was shut she said in an aggrieved tone to her visitor, 'I really do think John might have let me know that he was going out.'

Mr. Fisher could do nothing but smile and look deprecating; he felt that there were dangerous undercurrents in this placid-seeming marriage; it was a great pity. 'Dear lady,' he said after a little consideration, 'dear lady, you must not be too hard on us. Your standard is too high for mere men—and pray don't be too hard on my poor contributor. I do assure you that he is such a good fellow, so high-toned, such a gentleman.'

The lady gave no answer but a contemptuous jerk and snort. 'It's too provoking of John,' she said; 'it's always the way. Of course you wanted to see him about something important?'

‘Oh no, no,’ said Mr. Fisher, ‘it doesn’t matter—doesn’t matter in the least. I’ve no doubt I shall find him.’

‘Where?’

‘At Mrs. Lulham’s.’ It was not tactful, and Mr. Fisher knew it as soon as the words were out of his mouth; he felt that it was an unlucky day with him. ‘I rather think he is going there expecting to see me about something,’ he added lamely. ‘Good-bye, dear lady; I must fly.’ He pressed her hand, smiled the greatest possible encouragement, and hurried away. He raised his eyebrows as he ran downstairs, and whistled when he found himself safe in the street.

Lady Gertrude was hurt. Her husband had slipped out and gone to Susan Lulham’s. She had no doubt about that, and no doubt that he preferred the society of ‘that intrigu-



ing ridiculous little wretch' to her own. She could not sit down and work, or play on the piano. She could think of no comfort but in making herself uncomfortable ; she looked round for some annoying duty. She decided to put her husband's den in order, foreseeing that in doing something for him when he was treating her so badly she would find a dismal satisfaction. He might go to 'his rubbishy widows,' but she would still do her duty as a wife. She hurried down the stairs and shut herself into John's little room.

A little later John Maidment, who had been for an innocent stroll in the neighbouring park, let himself into his house and opened the door of his study. He stood still on the threshold, for there was his wife. Lady Gertrude had been sitting before his writing-table, but she bounced up at his entrance, red and

rustling and angry. 'No! don't come near me!' she cried out; 'don't come near me!'

'What's the matter?' asked John.

'You can ask what's the matter?' She pushed with the point of her shoe a loose sheet of paper which was lying on the floor, and John stooping picked up a bit of the rough draft of his ill-omened article. 'You wrote that disgraceful thing,' she said; 'you can't deny it.'

'I am not going to deny it.'

'And you put a false name to it—oh! the disgrace! the disgrace!'

'What ridiculous nonsense! Did you never even hear of a *nom de plume*?'

'*Nom de fiddlestick*! It's most base and cowardly, and——'

'Stop! I can't expect you to understand——'

‘ Oh ! ’ she cried stamping her foot.

‘ Will you be reasonable ? ’

‘ No.’

‘ Then I will go away till you recover your temper.’

‘ Yes, that’s right—go away—go back to Mrs. Lulham—that’s where you learn such tricks. Go back to your mountebank ! ’

John laughed, but the laugh was not pleasant. He really was amazed at her violence. He remembered that he had had some doubts about writing the article, but they had been such doubts as he was sure no other man in practical life would have admitted for a moment, and even he had dismissed them easily. And now he, the conscientious man, was attacked as if he had robbed a bank, and by his own wife ! He was disgusted. He looked at Gertrude, to whom grief was not

becoming ; her nose was red as well as her eyes ; in his disgust he declared to himself that she looked like a coarse and common virago.

‘You talk egregious nonsense,’ he said ;  
‘you know nothing about it.’

‘I know that you never cared for me—  
I know that—I know that you must have  
married me for my——’

Whether she said the obnoxious word is uncertain. John had turned white, and, as she thrust herself between him and the door as if she would compel him to hear her, he pushed her not too gently on one side and went out. He heard her angry cry as he pulled the door to behind him, and snatching his hat in the hall he made haste to get away from his home. John was angry with Fate, with his wife, a little angry with himself. He

admitted with some annoyance that, since his wife was wholly and ridiculously in the wrong, he ought to have been more tolerant of her absurdity. He walked about till he grew calm, and he made up his mind to punish Gertrude a little for her nonsense and then to forgive her loftily. The article was remarkably clever ; it had some capital phrases ; he was pleased with the little excitement which it had made. But he knew very well that with the next week's crop this telling paper would begin to fade, and that with the next month's abundant store it would be dead ; and he smiled as he thought that long before that an impulsive woman's anger would be in ashes, and she be weeping for her wicked speeches. She deserved a little punishment ; and so he determined to dine at his club without telling her of his intention, and to go home and

forgive her before midnight. If by chance a sun should appear in London on the next morning, it should not rise upon his wrath, however righteous. Thus did John Maidment venture to prophesy about a woman ; but, clever young man though he was, he was not on this occasion exactly right.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

JOHN dined at his club and read the papers, daily and weekly, until he thought that it was time to go home and dry his wife's repentant tears. He let himself into his hall, and there on the table he saw a little pile of letters and on the top of them a note without a stamp. With a shock of surprise, unpleasant as a sudden pail of water, he recognised the large handwriting of his wife. He tore the note open and read it by the light in the passage. The first words were enough to show that here was no mood of repentance.

‘After having struck me,’ she wrote—an

oath leapt from John's lips. Was not this the most exasperating thing which had ever happened to man? That he, John Maidment, should be accused of striking a woman! What was the use of keeping oneself on a higher level than other men, if such a thing as this could happen to one? He marched into his den, lighted two candles, and spread the exasperating missive flat on the outside of his blotting book. He would read it calmly and quietly and then go upstairs and speak very gravely indeed to his wife. In another moment he was aware that he might go upstairs, but would find no wife to profit by his words of wisdom.

‘After having struck me,’ she had written, ‘you can hardly be surprised that I have gone to my own people. I make no complaint. I make no concealment. I have



simply gone to my own people at Boucherett.' He dashed into the hall and picked up the empty envelope. As he expected, he had not broken any seal; the note had been stuck and very lightly; it was likely enough that every servant in the house had read it. How like her! She had no reticence—no refinement—no care that this abominable accusation should not be discussed in the servants' hall. His mind was working at double speed with the most painful and perplexing consequences. By this time he thought that his wife with her box and her burden of grievances was at Boucherett, a martyr, with all her sorrows displayed, or with that elaborated appearance of concealment which displays the most. He could see her pink-eyed, inconsolable, with the air of having done with life, and with a little enjoyment

in amazing her stolid mother. To-morrow it would be talked about in the drawing-room, the housekeeper's room, the servants' hall, the harness-room, the village pothouse, and the new coffee tavern. He declared to himself with exceeding bitterness that for him it might be no less than ruin. He cursed his luck. What cruelty of Fortune that his career should be spoilt at its outset by his pushing past a woman with a little too much impatience—and such a career! He had never felt so certain of the future, which would have been his but for this accident. He felt as if the pearl of all the world had been his and had slipped from his wet fingers to the dark unmeasured sea. He had made a capital start; he was master of a fountain of eloquence, which bubbled up as free and clear as if it were one with the fountain of youth

itself; he had industry, ability, charm. He had had character: character had been that which distinguished him from other politicians, of whom many had industry, all some measure of ability, a few some personal charm. He had known so well that his character was his special recommendation—the lamp which he must keep bright if he would dazzle the eyes of men. He had impressed everybody from his early boyhood by his earnestness; it was this which had given more than half its effect to his eloquence. He had always known this, but now it seemed all doubly sure as he trembled lest he should lose it all. A domestic scandal, a separation from his wife at the very outset of their married life—it was enough to blast the most promising career of the day. Fight as he might, and speak as nobly as he could, the shadow would

not depart from his life. He declared to himself that this trumpery misunderstanding might be for him no less than ruin.

As he stood pale and silent by his writing-table, he began mechanically to open the letters which he had picked up from the hall table with this fatal note. His mind was busy with this wretched business, while he glanced over a few bills, circulars, and notes of no importance, and dropped them from his limp fingers. The last of the pile was from America, and recognising Paul's handwriting, he felt, even in the midst of his annoying thoughts, a faint curiosity. He tore open the letter, and saw that Paul had written from his ranch in Montana.

‘I have late news of your father,’ John read, ‘from a trustworthy man. He has had what may turn out a real stroke of luck, but

he is very far from well. As soon as my mate comes back here, I shall start for Leadville, but he won't be back for a month and I can't leave the beasts before. Then I shall be free to stay in Colorado till I have put the affair straight for your father; but I want you, if you can, to come out and see to him. From what I hear he ought to be taken right away out of the place; he is doing no good there. Come, if you can, and take him away to England and take care of him, while I see to this mining affair of his. If you can't come, send a travelling servant who has been off the beaten track and has his wits about him and is not too old. But come yourself if you can. If you start at once on receipt of this, I can meet you at Pueblo, and we can go up together. Wire if you come or send substitute. Your way is by New York,

Chicago, C. B. and Q. and Acheson and Topeka Railways, all plain sailing, and I think you ought to come if you can.'

This was Paul's letter, and as John read it, his mind began to work with new possibilities. Was this the way of escape from his troubles? If the letter had come yesterday, he knew that he would have been searching for a courier with both youth and experience; but now it might be well that he himself should go. The mere idea roused him from his dull depression to his proper vitality, his nervous energy. Should he go? Should he start at once? He concentrated all his thinking powers on this question. He saw at a glance that it was an immense temptation, for it would free him from the immediate and most annoying necessity of trying to bring his wife back. He abhorred the idea of going to Boucherett

in the morning, of interviews, of correspondence, of having to defend his conduct, which needed no defence. He was tempted to start for Leadville instead of Boucherett ; but since he realised the strength of the temptation, he was determined not to yield to it until he was sure that it would be the best possible means of strengthening his position in the future. He pressed his head between his hands and sat thinking. Would it not be well for him to start at once for the Rocky Mountains? If he went he could leave behind him a clear statement of the reason of his going—a reason which gave a full and admirable explanation of his temporary separation from his wife. He would take care that it should be stated, both publicly and privately, that urgent private affairs had summoned him to America. He would leave a better and more circum-

stantial story, which was moreover true, with people who were sure not to keep it to themselves. It should be freely mentioned that he had been called to his father, and had set out with striking haste to the heart of the Rocky Mountains. If there were also fickle rumours of possible wealth and possible peril, they would add to the picturesqueness of the story, and make it float more easily and in a wider circle. His quick mind began to foresee interested faces, and to compose newspaper paragraphs.

On the other hand, John knew that there would be whispers, idle or malignant or both. It was certain that tongues would wag with rumours of a quarrel between himself and his wife. But it was already too late to prevent this. Even if he brought her home to-morrow, there would be some nods full of meaning,



some babbling over teacups ; and it was by no means certain that he would succeed in bringing her home to-morrow. Gossip there must be, and, if he did not go away, the tale of their quarrel would have no tale to contradict it. If he did go, the whisper of one would be met by the loud denial of another, who knew for a fact that John Maidment had been called to America on urgent private affairs (probably involving a great increase of wealth), and that Lady Gertrude had gone, as was natural, to her own people, and would stay with them till he returned.

He wondered if he dared to trust his wife to be decently reticent. If she spent the next few weeks with her people, he knew that she would wear too often an injured air, and would allow herself too often a plaintive remark or a sigh full of meaning. But he

thought that she would not go beyond this in her intercourse with the outer world, and that she would accept his story and let it pass as a full explanation of her separation from him. He counted on the reaction after this bold step which she had taken ; he thought that she would be rather frightened, and that, when she learned that he was going away for an indefinite time to face difficulties, perhaps dangers, she would be rather softened too. Besides, he would leave influences to work upon her. When he had sat thinking for some time, he got up with the determination of going to Liverpool in the morning, and, if possible, of sailing on the next day.

John rang his bell softly, uncertain if his servant were still awake. He was anxious about this brief interview, and he stood so that he could see the man's face lighted by his

two candles. After a few minutes the man appeared in the doorway, and John told him that he had been called to America and that Lady Gertrude would remain at Boucherett till his return in a few weeks. He gave him a few commonplace directions, told him that he must pack in the morning, and sent him to bed. Looking closely at the man's face, he was sure that he received his story with perfect faith, and that he at least had not read Lady Gertrude's note. This seemed a good omen, and his spirits rose. He seated himself at his table and began to write. His first letter was to Mr. Fisher, who for his sake would see that some paragraphs were inserted in certain papers with which this prosperous editor had considerable influence. He was very frank in tone with Mr. Fisher. He told him that his father's affairs were taking him to

Colorado, and that, as a public man, he wished the public to have a chance of knowing why he went and whither he was going. At the end he mentioned that his wife had gone to Boucherett and would probably stay there till he returned, and he added a playful postscript.

To Basil Gustard, who would be immensely flattered by the attention, John wrote a more picturesque account of the summons which he had received, and of the adventurous journey which he was about to make; and he playfully advised him to refer to it in the society paper to which he was a frequent contributor. Then John dashed off the same thing in a chivalrous note to Mrs. Lulham, who sat at the centre of so great a web of rumours; and finally, he enclosed a paragraph, carefully prepared by himself, to the editor of a widely-circulated daily paper,

who had shown a disposition to be friendly. He begged this useful acquaintance to insert his paragraph at the first opportunity, as he was called away so suddenly that he had not time to inform his friends, nor any person who might expect to consult with him on any public matter.

When these letters had been written with as much ease as propriety, John turned his attention to three of a different character. With ready pen he dashed off a note to Colonel Brent; and he was surprised, as he wrote, to find how pleased he was with the thought that the Colonel would approve of his prompt start; that Paul would be glad of his coming so quickly in answer to his appeal; that all the Brents would like him better for this decision. His next task gave him more trouble. He wrote to Mr. Randall, and told

him plainly that he and his wife had had a difference of opinion ; that she had misunderstood him, and had started for a visit to Boucherett before he had had a chance of convincing her that she had misunderstood him. He told him that news of the utmost importance about his father had come, as soon as his wife had gone ; and that he was obliged to start for America at once, without even seeing Lady Gertrude. In these perplexing circumstances he appealed to Mr. Randall to use his great influence with the family at Boucherett, for their sake even more than for his own, to let no rumour of any disagreement get abroad before his return, which would be very soon. He pointed out that until his return the separation needed no explanation ; and he ended by assuring Mr. Randall that the dispute was

about a trifle, and that he trusted to his tact and ability, and friendship for his wife's family, as he would trust no qualities of any other man. He was very careful in writing this letter, and, when it was finished, he was content with it. Another, a more impetuous version, he wrote to Lady Whimley.

‘I hope,’ he wrote at the end of it, ‘that Gertrude will some day learn that, whatever my faults may be, I am incapable of rudeness to a woman. I will not write of my wretched position—of my being obliged to start on this wild journey, leaving this cloud above my home. I prefer to look to the future, and to hope that all will yet be well.’ He felt that he was behaving well, and, as much of the night had now gone, he went upstairs, and in a short time was wrapped in a deep sleep.





V.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

THE great steamer drove across the vast plain of the Atlantic, bearing John Maidment and his fortunes. At the first throb of the screw he felt relief; he was away on his journey, and neither letters nor telegrams could reach him for ten days to come. The winds were light, and scarce a qualm interfered with his placid mood; he had no acquaintance on board, and he could walk the deck or sit wrapped in his well-lined ulster considering in solitude his position and himself. If it sometimes occurred to him to doubt the excellence of some thing which he had done, he put the

doubt aside with ease. It seemed as if he had attained that happy stage in which it is sufficient answer to the reviewing conscience to say, 'It cannot have been wrong, for it was I who did it,' and to say this not with pain and grief of hot contention, but with the calm of full belief. Wrapped in his long overcoat and his ample virtue, John dismissed the occasional doubts of his conduct in this or that matter, confident that, had the thing not been just and right, he would not have done it.

As John reviewed the arrangements which he had made before starting, he could see little to criticise. He had set the little engines going which would best do his work, and he believed more fully that all must come right between his wife and him. He knew that she would suffer, as she deserved to suffer; that she would beg for pardon, as it

was her duty to beg. Now, when he was further from the crisis which had startled him, he counted with much less doubt on her love for him. Already she was feeling pangs of remorse ; for she knew that her conduct had sent her husband afar on his lonely journey without one word from her of kindness or farewell. She would be eager to make any atonement, and would accept with zeal the story which he had left as an explanation of their separation. He felt that she was already looking forward, though she probably had not yet confessed it, to their next meeting. He trusted her love.

But John did not encourage his thoughts to look backward ; he liked to send them flying before the hurrying vessel, travelling without pause by sea and land, where he without pause would follow them. He felt a

lively curiosity about his father, an eagerness to see him. The image which he had cherished as a boy, and which had faded not a little in the full days of his first contact with the world, leapt up bright and vivid. He recalled and gazed upon the vision of the fine fair face with the silky moustache; he could almost hear again the light gay laugh; he remembered that he had always known that his father was a charming man. He reminded himself that he would find this brilliant young person a man of more than fifty years, and, if Paul were right, with health somewhat damaged; but the delicate lines, which showed the passage of time and work perhaps too hard for so fine a being, took nothing from the charm. He looked forward to adopting this delightful parent; to bringing him to England and showing him to his

friends with pride. He recognised too the convenient fact that Colonel Brent would be at all times glad of his old friend's presence, and that, when it was better for all parties that they should be only two at home, Wilfred Maidment would live with his old admiring Philip. If this stroke of luck, of which Paul wrote, should with former earnings give a small income to the most pleasing of unknown fathers, then indeed all difficulties would disappear. But John would not allow his thoughts to dwell on this possibility; he was quite ready to be generous to his father, and since his marriage he was able to be generous with a due regard to moderation and to the interests of his wife.

So John Maidment, easily thinking and imbibing the salt air, was borne on a prosperous voyage across the broad Atlantic, and with no

rest passed from sea to land and so still westward in the cars. New York was to him no more than a great harbour ; a half-built bridge swung high in the air like the abandoned plaything of a giant ; docks and warehouses and straight streets—all seeming clean and clear, with smoke which did not brood and choke the city but went straight up and was lost in the cool far-off blue. At Chicago he caught a glimpse of what seemed a small city of piled logs, and in another part vast gaunt buildings for the storage of the golden grain. Then away he went again, carried steadily westward day and night—across the broad swift stream of the Mississippi ; through patches of charred stumps ; through regions of Indian corn ; through miles and miles of growing wheat ; with scarcely a man to be seen, and only here and there in the great solitude a white-painted



wooden house, which seemed not to have been built into the soil, but to have been set ready-made thereon by the careful fingers of a child. Then, when it had begun to seem the natural state of man to live his life upon a moving train, John passed from fertile lands to barren plain. He was beginning to suffer from restlessness, and he walked more often through the cars and stood on the wooden platform at the back of the train, finding a strange fascination in the two straight lines stretched, as it seemed, across half a world without a break and without a curve. Alone and conversing only with himself he was impressed more and more deeply by the immensity. Fresh from his crowded England he thought that here was room for superfluous millions; and over the wide-reaching land a wider heaven seemed to spread by day its

cloudless blue, by night its myriads of more piercing stars.

Perhaps John had had enough of this journeying on and on, as if he were to go on for ever ; perhaps, though he slept as well on board the train as on board the boat, he was beginning to suffer from the want of absolute rest. It is certain that he gave a sigh of relief when the cars stopped at Pueblo, and that he looked out with lively interest to see if Paul were there. He was disappointed, for no Paul was there, but, as he stood looking about him, a tall powerful man with a red beard and a watchful eye asked him if he were Mr. Maidment, and without further words offered him a letter.

‘ This business of your father’s,’ Paul had written, ‘ seems so pressing that I go on to Leadville at once by shortest route. My

friend Hall takes his buggy to Leadville over the Western Pass, which is just open, and he will take you with him.'

John, who had been frowning over this note, looked up with a smile, and said, 'Mr. Hall?' and the big man, who had been watching him, nodded rather shyly. He had been waiting to see if the Englishman was going to be friendly or 'to put on frills.' John was quick enough to feel that here in Colorado there was small wisdom in giving oneself airs of superiority. This gigantic owner of the buggy was by this ownership a better man than he; he appealed to him with an engaging air of helplessness to convey him as soon as possible to his friend Paul Brent. It was arranged that they should sleep that night at Colorado Springs, and start early on the next day for Leadville. The

way through the cañon of the Arkansas river, by which Paul had gone, was decidedly shorter; but John, though he chafed a little at the thing being settled for him, was glad that he had not to face the Rocky Mountains for the first time alone. Besides, since Paul was already at work on his father's affairs, the delay of a day or two in his own arrival would do no harm. He went to bed in a bare room which opened straight on to the plain, and slept sound in a stationary bed and in the pure keen air of Colorado.

John woke early, for the room was full of clear light; and, when he opened his door, there were snow-capped peaks of the famous Rocky Mountains standing all of a row, glittering like mounds of salt and seeming so near that they tempted his quick blood to climb one before breakfast. It was lucky

that he resisted the temptation ; for, though his train ascending imperceptibly from the far-off Mississippi had climbed so high that John stared at these gleaming mountain-tops from a height of some six thousand feet above the sea, the nearest of the peaks was a long and a hard day's journey. But John was not busying himself with calculations of height nor with the effect on distance of that rare fine air. He only felt the new elixir in his blood, and breathed in a new vigour and a keener longing to be off. He was restless till the home-made buggy had appeared with its two sound plain-headed long-tailed horses, and till he was on his way with Mr. Sam Hall beside him and his portmanteau tied on behind them with a strong much-twisted rope. Up the long pass they went, slowly rising, meeting never a soul, listening

to the little stream which hurried down under tangle of undergrowth and shade of well-grown fir-trees. The only sign that this was a way of men were the empty meat-tins which shone in an unbroken line by the roadside; the only live creatures to be seen were the little striped chipmunks darting under the fallen trunks, or the blunt-nosed prairie dogs who sat up and stared solemnly at them before they turned upside down into their homes. John was almost intoxicated by the wonderful air, which seemed as if no man had been there to breathe it since the golden age. He was so lively that he could not sit still, but jumped from the waggon and walked upward, humming fragments of tunes and feeling as if, were he to press his two feet hard upon the track, he might spring from the earth and float upward to the amazement of science.

When he began to fear that he might seem unsociable, he climbed again to his seat and talked to his companion.

Mr. Sam Hall, who was by this time almost convinced that he need not be on his guard against patronage, allowed himself to talk more easily. He answered John's questions, and even asked him a few in turn of a highly personal nature. He asked John where he was born and what he did for a living; and, when the Englishman announced that he was a politician, he turned a humorous eye on him as if he expected an apology for so equivocal a profession. John laughed as he answered the slow questions of his mighty companion, and was glad to feel that his answers gave him the right of asking questions in turn. He was eager to know about the profits in cattle, the profits in corn,

the life on the plains, the life in the mountains ; and he soon found that Mr. Sam Hall had had a large experience and had done pretty well in several ways. Mr. Hall, who had gone West as a boy from a village of Massachusetts, and whose form and voice had both been mellowed by long absence from the east winds of the New England coast, was a more important person than John had gathered from the first sight of his dull gigantic boots and of the old flannel shirt which was barely visible above his coat collar.

The pleasant chat by the way of these new comrades was interrupted by a small incident, which gave to the young Englishman a moment's shock. A prairie dog had sat up to stare, as so many of his race had stared already, at the approaching vehicle,



and in an instant he was dead, and John saw Mr. Hall returning his revolver to its place under his coat-tails.

‘Why did you do that?’ cried John sharply; he had started at this sudden shot; he was vexed at the unnecessary slaughter of this innocent-faced little beast.

‘I kind o’ felt like it,’ said the other after a minute’s consideration. ‘I guess there are quite a number left,’ he added presently. But John was still annoyed as if by a jarring note in the high-pitched harmony of that exciting morning. His companion, with his air of a respectable small farmer, was so unlike the fancy pictures of the desperadoes of the Rocky Mountains, that it had not even occurred to him that there was a pistol of any kind concealed by those ample peaceful coat-tails. Not till they had descended

from their chariot and had eaten their frugal meal of canned meat and bread by the side of the little clear stream which hurried through the underwood, did John recover his sympathy with his guide ; but then, as he lay at length and listened to the stream, which prattled English like the brooks thousands of miles away, he felt friendly again, and, as he passed his flask of whisky to his mate, he smiled as if he were offering his friendship too. Thereupon another surprise was his, for Sam Hall shook his head, and being pressed announced deliberately that nothing under the bite of a rattlesnake would induce him to touch whisky. Sitting very straight with his great legs straight before him, he declared to John, who observed him with keen interest, that there was no safety for the man who came West but total abstinence. Weary

days and lonely evenings had changed many moderate men, whom he had known, into confirmed drunkards. He spoke gravely, though he used some picturesque and peculiar phrases; and, when he had ended, he emptied his mug of water and got up and shook himself, and went to see if his horses had fed properly.

It was evening when the travellers came out of the long pass, up which they had been climbing since morning, and entered a widening plain. To John it seemed as if they had been carried far away into some English park. There were wide grassy lawns, softly sloping mounds, and clumps of trees which looked as if they must have been placed by the cunning of man for beauty's sake. Rolling slowly along on a half-seen track, they saw away on the right a reddish glow, and turning

thither they presently came to a rough stone wall, and scarcely higher than the wall a rough stone house. Inside the enclosure besides this one-storeyed house there were sheds for horses and cattle and a sty for pigs. The contrast between this abode and the vast beautiful park, which to his English eyes was the fit surrounding of a palace, made John smile, but even as he smiled he felt how grim it was—this gray stone house squatting low in the fast-gathering shadows.

## CHAPTER XXV.

THE owner of the ranch was a stolid Yorkshireman, who made the travellers welcome for the night with no apology for the roughness of his home or the coarseness of his fare. In the mountains it was a matter of course that any passer-by should have his share of food and a place for his blanket. More than this the Yorkshireman's dwelling-place did not afford ; there was as little luxury within as beauty without. There were but three rooms, and a sort of den behind in which cooking was done ; and when John passed through the front door into the centre room he was struck by its

bareness. A long rough deal table stood on the bare floor; one form of like kind was in its place by the table, but one end of the other had been dragged across to the corner of the fire, and on it three men were sitting, tired, silent, and smoking. The fire-light shone red, but rather sullen, on the bent figures of the smokers, their coarse worn clothes and long dirty boots; no one of the three made a movement when the strangers followed their host out of the darkness and he shut the door behind them. On either side of this central room a doorway with no door led into a room of the same size and shape, but these were only two caverns of darkness to John as he glanced curiously at them. It seemed strange to him that it was he who was there; he felt a faint excitement at this sudden entry of himself, the remarkable child

of a complicated civilisation, into a state of life so primitive ; he began to describe it to himself in picturesque words. It was evident that these slouching cowboys by the fire were smoking after their evening meal ; for presently from his lair in the rear emerged the tall rough-headed youth, who was so little like a cook, bearing a portion of steak and a pot of coffee for the travellers, who were to sup alone. John had been made hungry by the keen mountain air, and succeeded in eating some of the tough meat without vegetables and in drinking the black coffee without milk, while the massive jaws of Sam Hall vanquished the rest of this Spartan meal without an effort.

When John had made an end of this fine exercise of mastication he looked about him ; and by the light of the solitary candle in the iron candlestick, which the cook had brought

in with their supper, he saw a book at the further end of the table, a book which was the library of the ranch. He fetched this valuable work, and bringing it nearer to the candle began to turn over the leaves. It was such a book as his Yorkshire host was likely to know well; it was full of coloured prints of sporting scenes, and John was going through them slowly with half-attentive eye, when he was aroused by the voice of the Yorkshireman saying, with the first laugh which he had heard that evening, ‘So you’ve slept it off, have you?’

John looked up and saw opposite to him, in the empty doorway, a man who compelled his attention. It was no strength in this new-comer which exercised compulsion: he was like weakness made man. Unlike Sam Hall and unlike these men at the ranch, he had made a feeble effort at the picturesque, as if at some



time he had thought it right to dress the part of the wild ranger of the Rocky Mountains. His flannel shirt, soiled and stained, was of a deep red colour; about his shrivelled waist was a cartridge-belt half full of cartridges; his hat, in which he seemed to have been sleeping, had a width and flexibility of brim which might have been pulled into a becoming shape. But he had the look of one who had slept long in his clothes, and his trousers, which had half slipped from his belt, were flopping on his shapeless wry-heeled shoes. He stood swaying slightly in the doorway, and paid no attention to his host's question nor to the group of cattle-men by the fire.

One of these took his pipe from his mouth, and with a slow drawling voice said, 'Dook, I guess this Englishman can tell you something of the other dooks.'

The speaker nodded sideways at John, at whom the new-comer seemed to be staring, though the shadow of his broad-brimmed hat made it impossible to see his eyes. The other cowboys chuckled, and the Yorkshireman said to John, 'They call him "the dook," because he kept such high-toned company at home. The boys stand him drinks, and he tells them stories of the aristocracy.'

John looked at this poor devil with a cold contempt. He remembered what Sam Hall had told him by the way of the dangers of drinking in these wilds; if this man opposite had been really a gentleman, there was no need to look further for an example.

Presently the dook started himself from his doorway and came towards the table. Steadying himself opposite John, he plucked off his hat and allowed his head to drop;

perhaps he meant to greet him with a bow. His face thus exposed to the candlelight was the face of a fair man, and therefore more aggressively dirty than the face of a dark man could be. The hair of his head was thin and yellow-gray; his beard was grayish-yellow, thin and straggling; and while one end of his moustache drooped with a hopeless air, the other had been pulled out to a point as if by some old nervous habit of the slender grimy fingers. His cheeks were pale and his thin nose rather red, and he looked at John affectionately with a pair of pale-blue bloodshot eyes. Altogether the dook was at his lowest level of appearance; and yet John felt sure that this disreputable loafer had been born and brought up as a gentleman. He looked round for Sam Hall, as if he would acknowledge the soundness of

his statement on drink, but Mr. Hall had gone out to look after his horses.

The owner of the ranch had fallen asleep with his head on the table, and the men by the fire seeing that no fun was to be got from the dook on that evening, had sunk back again to their silence and their smoking. John saw with amusement and vexation that he was probably condemned to a talk with this bibulous individual, who seemed to regard him with interest. The dook sighed, and then, as his eyes fell from John's face to the book which he was reading, he smiled again. 'Ah, what fun it was!' he said at the sight of the print full of red coats, and he gave a feeble imitation of a view holloa which ended in a hiccough. Jerked into a momentary gravity by this trifling accident he said with much self-

satisfaction, 'I knew you were English the moment I saw you. I knew it by clothes and things; it's unmistakable.' He seemed to feel surprise at his rapid conquest of his last word; he tried to repeat it, failed, and laughed. Then he turned himself half round, and said, 'This coat was made in England—some time ago. I suppose it's awfully old-fashioned by this time.' He seemed anxious for John's verdict, and regarded him with a conciliating, an almost beseeching eye.

John looked at the greasy old coat, which was thrown back from the red flannel shirt, and said that it was a very good coat.

'One gets so rusty, you know, in these infernal mountains,' said the dook piteously; and after a moment he added, looking sideways and smiling, as if he were begging for merciful consideration, 'I suppose they

wouldn't look at me now in any decent club.'

It was not necessarily a question, and John hesitated. He did not like to go on lying, and he did not like to hurt the poor man's feelings; he might have said with perfect truth that the dook, if he entered any sort of club, was sure to be looked at. Hesitating, he looked across the table at the shrunken soaked figure, and saw that a large tear was trickling down the thin red nose. His heart smote him; he wished that he could be more friendly, but, though he felt pity, the pity was no stronger than the contempt. To this young man it seemed almost incredible that a gentleman, with the start which birth and education give, should run down to this. The dook was looking at him furtively, piteously, with a watery smile,

and, when John had brought out some encouraging words, he seemed on a sudden to take heart of grace. With a fatuous leer and a brief straightening of the figure he said, 'They used to look at me—everywhere.' He pulled out the stiffer end of his moustache to a finer point, and assumed a vanquishing air, and then with his head on one side, coaxing, he asked, 'Don't the fellows ever speak of me?' Haven't you heard 'em speak of me?'

'I haven't the pleasure of knowing your name,' said John smiling.

'You don't know my name?' said the other, laughing feebly. 'My name is Maidment—Wilfred Maidment.'

John did not cry out. After a minute he shut his eyes, feeling a deadly sickness, and he presently moved his arms on the

table as if he would assure himself that he were not dreaming nor paralysed. Then he was seized by the strong desire to get away—to be alone and to think. He rose so quickly that he stumbled, and striking the iron candlestick sent the light rolling on the floor. ‘I beg your pardon,’ he cried out, and his voice sounded strange in his ears, and hurrying to the door he pulled it open and went out into the night. He went beyond the wall, and then in the darkness he sat down upon the ground and pressed his two hands to his forehead, as if he would force his sickened brain to work. There he sat motionless till he was almost benumbed; and then the sudden fear of being ill made him stumble to his feet. The idea of being kept in this place by illness was terrible. He must go back to the house,



or his absence would make the people wonder and questions would be asked about him. If they began to question Sam Hall, what might not be said? If he but spoke the word 'Maidment!' what mischief words might do! He was half sick with fear when he thought that even now they might be talking. He was not afraid of being recognised. Though he had knocked over the candle in obedience to the instinct of self-preservation, he assured himself that he need have no fear of recognition; and yet no assurance could prevent the quivering of his nerves.

John stood in the darkness forcing his courage to the moving point. 'He will be asleep now,' he said to himself; 'surely he will be asleep now.' He forced his feet to take him to the door, and after listening

for a moment he pushed the door softly open and went in.

The big fire was still burning red, but there was nobody in the room. John glanced with apprehension at the doorway in which the dook had first appeared ; it was dark, and from within came the deep breathing of sleeping men. John guessed who was sleeping there among these men, and turned to the opposite doorway, from which a pale light was still shining. He looked into the room and anxiously tried to see who were there. It was no easy job. Rude shelves were fitted low down against the wall, and on them lay the Yorkshireman and a couple of cow-boys, each rolled in his big blanket. One of the boys had a lighted candle in his rough berth, and was reading an old newspaper which Sam Hall had brought in his

capacious pocket. It was by the light of this smoky flame, which needed snuffing, that John peered at the sleepers. On the bare floor two mattresses had been thrown down, and on one of them two more men were lying. Though each was rolled in his blanket, John was sure that neither was slight enough for the form which he feared to see. On the other mattress, which was almost at his feet, the vast bulk of Mr. Hall was stretched, and John perceived that something less than half of the uninviting couch was left for him. He looked round once more, but could make out nothing else but a couple of coloured prints from an old number of 'The Illustrated London News,' which one of the men had stuck above his sleeping-shelf; these were the only decoration of the house. He slipped off his

coat and laid himself softly down on his dusty resting-place, disturbing no one of the weary dogs which lay and slept upon the floor among the weary men.

Presently the literary cowboy blew out his guttering candle, and there was no light in the place but a faint red reflection from the fire in the central room. John lay and watched this dull illumination which slowly died. He could not turn over without touching his large neighbour; and lying there upon the unswept floor among the men and dogs, he felt all his sensitive skin ac creep with strange sensations; but neither want of room nor restlessness of body kept sleep from John Maidment's eyes. He had rolled up his coat for a pillow, but, had that pillow been the lace-edged comfort of the most luxurious of luxurious youths, he would not

have slept that night. He lay and told himself that the night must end at last; he could not help thinking, and to no purpose—thinking in vain he lay expectant of the tardy dawn.

At the first faint streak of light John rose, and in moving took care to wake his mate, who, accustomed to rise as soon as his eyes were open, got up, yawned mightily, and went again to his horses. John found a tin basin by the pump in the yard, and plunged his hot head into it, and felt better for a time. But the minutes were leaden-footed. He saw Sam Hall lead out his beasts, and he thought that the harnessing would never be finished. He went back to the house, and found the cowboys stirring, pulling on boots, taking their turns at the pump, swallowing quick breakfasts; and all the time—the

dragging, wretched time—he kept his eyes, which ached with sleeplessness, on that empty doorway, in which he feared to see that man. He thought that Hall would never have finished his hasty meal; the few words of farewell which their host uttered seemed endless, and his comments on their team loud as a trumpet. The noise of the horses at the door was enough to awaken the dead; and all the time he was fearful of showing his impatience, which seemed always ready to break into a cry.

At last they could start; and then in the last minute John could not help stepping to the doorway, which had been the centre of his fears, and giving one glance into the room. Almost at his feet, stretched on a dusty mattress, lay the man, heavily sleeping. He was wofully lean and pallid in the clear pitiless

light; his fallen jaw made his cheeks seem hollow as those of one starved. A great sob broke from John before he was aware, and terrified again, lest this sound should wake the sleeper, he turned and hurried away.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

‘I GUESS you are pretty sick,’ said Mr. Sam Hall, who had turned his open inquiring eye on his companion three or four times before he spoke. John had sat silent behind the patient horses, who had subsided from a shambling trot to the walk at which they accomplished their day-long journeys. He could think of nothing yet but of the distance, growing each moment greater, which separated him from the ranch; and to the clear-seeing eye of his mate he looked haggard. Mr. Hall’s comment on his appearance made him start, and made him uncomfortable; the observant



eye made him nervous. He jumped from the slow-moving waggon, and said that he should be better for walking.

John tramped forward through a somewhat desolate land. They were now some nine or ten thousand feet above the level of the sea, but they had entered a flat plain, one of the Rocky Mountain Parks, and all day long their track lay through miles of yellow grass. It was a sullen region, with nothing to arouse the mind from brooding thoughts. John wanted to think, but he was dull and stupid, and he had trudged along for some time before he began to think to any purpose. Little by little the keen exciting air and the steady movement, which stirred his blood, set his mind a-working with more life. He raised his head and turned and looked away behind him. They had left the ranch miles

away ; there was no figure of a man upon the track. He knew that there was no chance of his being followed, and yet he could not help a feeling of relief when he saw the great bare plain. He was away ; he had gained time ; he could think. He knew that he must think now, for he must decide what he should do before he met Paul. Had he not decided already ? Could there be any doubt ? He asked himself the question, and cried out that there could be no doubt, as if from his inmost soul. It was impossible to take that man to England—to show such a man to the world as the father of John Maidment. And he had meant to be so proud of his father ! What an unlucky man he was ! He pitied himself. What had he done that at the crisis of his career he should find this drag-chain about his feet ? It was the very moment for

pressing forward, and he was weighted with lead. Perhaps he should not be free for years to come; perhaps his career was ruined. Fortune with the finest irony had given him the golden mouth and the subtle brain, and had brought him all these thousands of miles to meet paralysis. He clenched his fists till he felt his nails in his palms; he looked after the buggy with hatred of this Hall who had brought him by this route. Had he gone by the shorter way, through the cañon of Arkansas, he would not have met the man—he might never have met him. But he had met him, and now he must decide. It was clear that he could not take him to England. Nobody could ask that. He imagined himself presenting him at Boucherett. Whatever else he decided, he had decided at least that the man must be left in the Rocky Mountains.

And it was better for the man himself to be left in the mountains. With this thought came the first comforting glow to the sickened heart of John Maidment. It would be cruel to take this poor man into a world for which he had become so woefully unfit. For his own sake he must be allowed to remain where he was. For his own sake too it were well that he should never know that he had seen his son. John remembered his pitiful questions about coats and clubs, and feared his foolish vain regrets, his timid longings for a vanished London life. He said to himself with decision that this poor fellow must never know that he had met him. Nobody need know that they had met : his mere duty was silence.

And now John's plans began to take shape more readily. On the evening of the next day he would meet Paul in Leadville.

If Paul did not know where Wilfred Maidment was, John would tell him that he could not wait, that he must get back to the railway by the shortest route, and so to England ; he would tell him so much of his disagreement with his wife as would explain the necessary shortness of his visit. He would leave everything to Paul ; the arrangements for the comfort of his father, when he had found him—as of course he would find him ; the arrangement of this mining business, whatever it might turn out to be. Only one thing he would take care to impress upon him—he must not send or bring his father to England till he had written to him and heard from him. Once in England and alone John trusted to his logic and his eloquence, to the wise exhaustive letter which he would write, to convince Paul—that, whatever else was settled, this poor

unhappy man must remain in the mountains. If he found that Paul already knew where Wilfred Maidment was, John foresaw with annoyance that he must persuade his friend there and then that the one utterly unwise course—the impossible course—was to take his father with him to England. Of course it was impossible; but he felt a sudden anger against Paul as he thought that it might be hard to convince him of the impossibility. He foresaw with keen annoyance that he might have to dash himself again, a sensitive live being, against these stony Brents; it was hard that his lot had been cast among these pig-headed one-ideal people.

But John was growing more hopeful now with every stride. He decided that Paul would have been so busy with Wilfred Maidment's business, which had called him so im-

peratively to Leadville, that he would not yet have found time to hunt for the man himself; and so he, John, would get away to England, and get away alone, and would take good care that his father should not follow him. That was the one thing necessary, the one thing absolutely good for all parties. If this stroke of luck should be a real stroke of luck, the poor broken man would command all the comforts, even all the luxuries, which Colorado can afford. If the affair should be a disappointment, John promised himself that he would send money from England—money enough to secure for the unfortunate gentleman the sort of life which was most suitable for him. His imagination began to picture Wilfred Maidment as the lodger with some excellent family in Colorado Springs, carefully tended, kept clean and sweet, perhaps re-

formed. His imagination worked most nimbly at this labour of love, and there was the old man in the easiest chair, the centre of most loving watchfulness, nourished by the finest air in the world, and spending his last days with every comfort which money could procure, and with the best of comforts, rest. To rob him of this, to transplant him to an atmosphere for which he had become wholly unfit, would be mere madness. John was certain of this.

At the mid-day halt Sam Hall saw that his companion was better, and, observing that he ate with a fine appetite, he dismissed all anxiety and himself ate with a finer. In the afternoon they sat sociably again side by side and talked of Indians and rattlesnakes and other unpleasant creatures, which Mr. Hall seemed to have arranged in one class; and so



journeying they came in the evening to a sort of large packing-case, unpainted and unpolished, which had been set up for the accommodation of travellers at the foot of the Western Pass.

In this bare deal hostelry they supped on the hash of the country, and a little later rolled their blankets about them in a tiny cabin, which they were lucky enough to have to themselves. John after his last wretched night slept heavily, but he awoke at dawn with a dream yet vivid with him, and sat up, trembling and listening for horses on the road. He was unquiet till they had started again and were climbing the Pass. The air was more and more rare and roused him to an unnatural excitement. He was in and out of the buggy a dozen times ; he found himself breathing more quickly, almost panting as

he walked; the points of his fingers were cracked; far-off objects seemed almost within reach of his hand. All along a long mountain-side was a forest of charred poles, where a fire had walked devouring; beyond the path of the flame the green firs came thronging up the slopes in armies, and above the masses of dark green glittered the mounds and peaks of white eternal snow. Here and there lay the carcase, slow to decay, of some dead over-driven beast, and tainted for a moment of passing the keen sweet air. At the top of the Pass the track was still difficult, and the horses slipped upon the melting ice and frozen snow, but as they began to descend again they moved more freely and were soon shuffling through the dust at a slow trot towards Leadville. Ten thousand feet or so above the sea, on the side

of a long shallow valley, which lies among the tops of the Rocky Mountains, stands the city of Leadville.

When John Maidment saw it, it was the youngest, as it is the highest, town in the world. Indeed it was some two years old, and boasted, for it had begun to speak, of forty thousand inhabitants, of whom very few were women. Men had come there from all parts, thousands of men, though the forty thousand was without doubt a pardonable exaggeration—each man hungry for silver and ready to give his life, if need were, in defence of his claim. Indeed, though the miners were for the most part peaceful and industrious, working with grim determination and keeping their weapons concealed, there were almost as many revolvers as men, and murder was a lighter crime than robbery. To punish

a thief, men who had not been robbed would tear themselves from the pursuit of treasure and ride day and night till they had killed him for an example. Everywhere were signs of the hunt for silver. The bleak rocky slopes were marked with holes and with earth flung out as if by the hind feet of gigantic rabbits; and, where the hole in the ground had been the door of fortune, it was covered by a great shed with its name as a full-grown mine painted thereon. Above the infantine city stretched a long belt of dark green forest of firs, and from this forest the city had been hewn, a city of brand-new deal boxes all of a row, unstained by moisture in that dry preserving air, unpainted and unpolished by the hand of man. Close above the belt of trees was powdery dazzling snow, which looked so near that it seemed as if one could put

one's hand into it. There was no distance, no mist, no moisture in that clean shallow cradle where the baby town lay high up among the topmost heights of the unchanging snow.

It was a busy time that year in Leadville, and there were not many loafers in the dusty street, when John Maidment and Sam Hall came at a meritorious trot and stopped before the biggest of all the wooden packing-cases, which was the hotel. A disreputable individual, who was smoking jerkily by the door, removed his pipe to say, 'The town is full of Tenderfeet,' and to spit; but John had hardly time to think if this were meant as a sign of dissatisfaction with his appearance before he heard a quick step in the passage, and saw Paul, the friend of his boyhood, coming quickly and with a fine blush, which showed itself through all the deep burning of that ardent sun.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN he had shaken hands with Sam Hall and had made him promise to take his evening meal with him, Paul grasped John by the arm and led him away through passages, which creaked under their feet, to the bedroom which he had secured for him. There was only one chair, and that was somewhat rickety; so Paul sat on the bed and stared at John and felt pity for him, thinking that he looked ill and nervous and older than he should. Paul himself looked stronger than of old. He seemed to have expanded in every way in the spacious Western world; he

was like a straight young sapling to which judicious clearing of encumbering growths had given a more generous portion of air and light. The long legs were stronger, the shoulders broader, and the chest deeper; and with more strength there was more freedom too. His head moved more easily on his neck than Brent heads were wont to move, and the Brent muscles looked as if in this specimen of the race they could be used more effectively and more quickly. The tall, fair, and rather stiff lad had gained more breadth and ease in manner as in body. Decided and confident, he was friendly also; he had lost a great deal of his early fear of showing feeling. In his life on the Plains he had rubbed shoulders with all sorts of folk and had rubbed off some portion of the family reserve: in long silent days and evenings he had learned

to regard human speech with less severity. And yet, though he felt as if he had a great deal to say to his old friend, he had changed so little from the reserved boy of former days that he found it hard to begin.

John could not sit down ; he was waiting in an agony for the other to speak. He walked up and down the little room restless, impatient, indignant with the Brent slowness of speech. Only a few minutes had passed since he followed Paul into the room, but he felt as if he had restrained his tongue for an hour, when at last he blurted out the question which had been in his mind so long. ‘Have you seen my father?’ he asked, and the anxiety in his voice seemed to Paul natural enough.

‘No,’ he said ; ‘he has gone away from Leadville, and I can’t tell where.’



John could not restrain a deep sigh, which expressed his relief. He sat down in the rickety chair and leaned his arms on the table ; he was apparently examining the great crack which divided the table from end to end ; he moistened his lips before he spoke again, and did his best to speak with a sufficiently careless air.

‘It’s a bore,’ he said, ‘that I can’t wait while you look for him. I am bound to get back at once to England ; I ought not to have come, but I could not help coming after your letter ; I could only give myself just time to get here and back.’

He looked up when he had made an end of this speech and saw Paul’s surprise and regret ; he felt that he must go on, and, before Paul could speak, he began to tell him that a difficulty had arisen between his wife and

himself; that, though it was about nothing, mischief might follow if he did not put it right; that he could not bear to be away longer. Paul saw in this statement the explanation of his friend's ill looks. He stretched his hand across the table and laid it on John's. 'You are quite right,' he said; 'it's an awful pity, but of course you are right. When must you go?'

'I must start at once,' said John anxiously, 'at once—to-morrow—by coach and rail down the cañon. I'll leave everything to you, and you will let me know at once when you have found him. Of course I leave everything to you.'

Paul pressed his hand again; he was full of silent sympathy with his friend.

'There's only one thing,' continued John, 'which I need say, and that is, that of

course you won't bring or send him to England till you have heard from me that—that it is possible.' He was drumming on the table with restless fingers and watching them with apparent interest, but, hearing no comment from Paul, he looked up at last with ill-concealed anxiety. Paul was pondering:

'But I can't promise that,' he said at last.

'What?' cried out John sharply.

'I can't promise—how can I? If I find him ill and—and wretched?'

John could say nothing in answer, for before his eyes arose a vivid picture of the poor wretch whom he had seen two days before; the picture stopped his tongue.

'Of course, if he were like that, I could not wait for letters,' said Paul; 'I should take

him clean out of this and straight away to you in England.'

John was too sick for argument at the moment; he felt the resolution of this other man like a weight on his tongue; he could only take some dismal comfort in the thought that he was going away to-morrow and that, when he had got safe away, it was likely that his flow of words would come back to him—that then he would prove by an eloquent letter to this stiff-necked friend of his childhood that it was in all ways best for Wilfred Maidment to end his days in Colorado. At least he would make it clear that he could not and would not receive this wretched man in England. He was savage with the wretched man—savage with Paul, who was regarding him across the narrow table with irritating sympathy—savage with Fate.

‘The truth is,’ said Paul presently with one of his old blushes, ‘that I’ve a poor account of your father. They say he’s in a bad way, broken down with disappointments and with—in fact, that he’s been drinking more than he ought. If that’s so, he ought not to stay here another hour. Drink plays the devil in this air; it ruins half the men who come West. Besides, well or ill, your father should be taken away. They say he’s always had a tribe of loafers and worse about him, and now, when he has plenty of money, they would simply live on him.’

‘Plenty of money!’

‘Oh yes, he has plenty now; I told you.’

‘You told me of some stroke of luck. Has it really turned out to be something?’

‘A million or so,’ said Paul smiling.

‘What?’ cried John with a sharp ring in his voice.

‘It would fetch a million now.’

‘What would? What is it?’

‘The mine.’

‘My father owns a mine worth a million?’

‘Dollars.’

‘A million dollars—how much is that—  
What is it in pounds?’

‘About two hundred thousand,’ said Paul;  
‘it’s probably worth a good deal more.’

‘My father!’ said John, with that vision of his parent again clear before his eyes. His hands clutched the rough table so hard that his fingers were dead-white; he was hungry for details; his eyes fastened on his friend’s face, imploring him to speak.

Paul felt as uncomfortable as if he had detected some deformity in this man, who

had been the ideal of his boyhood. He turned his eyes away as he began the little tale, and he told it with his most matter-of-course air, as if it were of small importance. It was one of those rare stories of luck, which go like fire from man to man and kindle greed, while the histories of the thousands who grub for silver till they die and barely pay their expenses are untold. The dook with almost his last handful of dollars had bought a hole in the ground from a rascal who thought he had gulled him; he had left it alone and almost forgotten it; at last one day, possessed by some strange fancy for labour, he had gone in and dug, and had dug scarce a foot deeper when he found pay dirt; and this had turned out to be no meagre allowance, such as rewarded the labours of many a Colorado miner, but a great rich

store of silver, which was certainly a fortune and might be one of the best mines in the place.

John Maidment heard the story of his father's luck, and as he listened his thoughts were flying. Why had he not known this when he met his father? It was the finest chance and he had lost it. If he had only known of this wonderful thing, he could have taken possession of his father then and there, and could now take him away at once from all danger of plunderers. What cruel luck that he had not known! If his father should remember that he had told him his name and that he had gone away without a word—gone like a stranger, without even the leave-taking of a chance acquaintance? He told himself that his father would not remember—would not know that he had known him as his father.



Nobody must know that he had recognised him that night. He must get back to him somehow; he must get hold of him and guard him. His fingers twitched; he could scarcely stay in his chair. 'Is it true?' he asked; 'is it really true that he has all that?'

'Yes, it's all right,' said Paul rather impatiently.

'But you said there was some hitch? Why did you hurry up here from Pueblo?'

'I heard at Pueblo that it was a big thing and that Sark, the wretched chap who sold it, was making a fuss.'

'Then there is a difficulty,' said John angrily—'what does he say?'

'He says one day that he never sold it, and another day that your father promised him half profits. He tells several stories, all different and all lies. Luckily, he thought he was

doing your father when he sold the thing, and so he took care that the sale was all correct. I've looked into it thoroughly; he hasn't a leg to stand on.'

'But has he given it up? Has he withdrawn his claim?'

'He is hanging on in the hope of getting something to keep him quiet.'

'Give him something,' cried John; 'surely that's the thing to do; there can be no question.'

'If you like,' said Paul grudgingly. 'The fellow is a liar and a bully and not worth sixpence; but of course you can promise, if you like, to use your influence with your father to give him something.'

'Yes, I think so,' said John quickly; 'I think that's the thing to do. Where is he? Where could I find him?'

‘I know where we can find him to-night.’

‘Where?’

‘Did you see that pretty scoundrel who spat just as you drove up to the door?’

‘Yes,’ said John.

‘That’s Mr. Garbets; he is Sark’s jackal and toady; he came to invite me to a conference with his chief at a drinking-den just out of the town.’

‘Are you going?’

‘I said no; but we can go if you like.’

‘Yes, yes—the sooner the better.’

‘Before he gets anything, he must give his written statement that he has not a ghost of a claim on the thing. Poor devil! He is a very hard ticket, but it was hard luck to be within a few inches of a fortune.’ Paul had got off the bed and come round the table, and as he passed behind John’s chair he laid his

hand a moment on his shoulder and pressed it, as if he would bid him not to worry. He felt as if there was something wrong with his friend and he wanted to help him. 'I'll leave you for a bit now,' he said, 'and look for Hall. We'll meet at supper, and then if you like we'll go and settle Mr. Sark.'

'All right !' said John with an effort at ease and friendliness. He was eager to be alone.

John was in a feverish state, which would have surprised himself had he had time to think of it. This tale, so baldly told, had seemed to him like the dry bones of a romance gorgeous as all the East. To-day a beggar ; to-morrow a millionaire. His fancy was hanging the bare framework, with all its silks and jewelled lamps ; while all the time he heard the whisper that nothing was sure

till the mine was sold and the money paid, and he had the money and his father safe at home in England. Nobody had ever accused him of avarice. He had always known that wealth was the most important thing in the England of to-day—that it doubled the weight of any man who was in public life. The clever politician, who was rich too, commanded a respect and carried a weapon for which John had not hoped. He had not wasted his thoughts on this matter, for he had never expected to be a rich man. By his marriage he had secured independence, and he had been content ; he had rid himself of that flavour of the adventurer which well-to-do Britons of all classes suspect in the politician with the slender purse. A fat purse is the ensign of respectability. John had looked for nothing more ; but now his father was a

rich man, and he was his father's heir. A latent chord of greed was struck; he longed to handle the price of the mine—to feel the power which he would wield—of course for the best ends.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHEN the friends had finished their supper and Paul and John were ready to go in search of Mr. Sark, it appeared that Sam Hall had made up his mind to join the party. He remarked that he had considerable experience of the hardest kind of hard tickets, and he guessed he'd go along too. So the three men stepped out together and stepped out briskly, for in those high regions, in early May, the nights are piercing keen and clear. John felt happier, for he was making the first step towards the settlement of this thing, which unsettled made him restless and eager as a

thirsty man in the desert who sees palm-trees in the distance.

The town was now full of miners, who had done their day's work, going in and out of the gambling sheds which stood open to the street, paying great prices for goods at a flaming gas-lit store—a moving crowd remarkable among crowds for its silence, and, as it seemed, most orderly and harmless. But when the three friends had left the town, the dusty road, by which the buggy had approached Leadville some hours before, lay desolate and dusky before them. They had not far to go, and, walking briskly they soon came to a rough shanty by the wayside, and could hear in the great silence a noise of voices and of oaths, which seemed to indicate a merry meeting. Paul, uncertain if this were the trysting-place to which he had been



bidden by the unsavoury Garbets, struck a light and read with more distinctness the irregular black letters which had been painted above the low door. 'Smile twice for two bits,' was the pleasant invitation which the simple vendor of drinks addressed to the passing traveller; and this enigmatical tavern-sign seemed to content Paul, for he pushed open the door and, stooping his head a little, went in. At the opening of the door a fine full blast of the fumes of bad whiskey rushed out into the cool clear night, and John, with a sudden disgust, followed his friend into the place. Sam Hall came in last, and, with a large toleration of the tastes of the patrons of the establishment, shut the door behind him.

It was a mere shed with a lean-to at the back, which the enterprising proprietor had built for himself as a temporary place of

business and with the strictest economy ; for it was as clear from the nature of his dwelling, as from the price and quality of his liquor, that this merchant had not (to use the language of the country) come there for his health. If to drink was to smile, as his sign seemed to announce, he may have reflected sometimes, with a certain irony, that there was no promise that the smile should not be a grin of anguish. The worthy man was doing a roaring trade ; these were good times in Leadville, and money was plentiful ; and the gayer spirits found a charm in this suburban retreat, where the liquor was the fiercest to be had at the price, and where the grimmest pleasantry prevailed and the very tallest stories were told.

They were but a small company who on that evening had created so spirituous an

atmosphere. Some half a dozen men sat on empty boxes which had held whiskey, or leaned against the rickety counter, which concealed the legs of the enterprising host.

When Paul entered, followed by his friends, Mr. Sark broke short an oration, which he was delivering to his own satisfaction, and carefully directed his attention to the newcomers. He was in that stage of intoxication which produced in him an air of dignity and a love of rhetoric. Having convinced himself of Paul's identity, he addressed the company again and congratulated them with a fine sweep of the arm and an irony perhaps less fine on the presence of 'these fine-haired men' at their humble meeting; he expressed his readiness to move a resolution of thanks. Paul, in answer to the stern inquiring eye of the host, asked for drinks, and then, fixing his eye

on Mr. Sark, said that they had come on business, and suggested that they should go outside and discuss it. Mr. Sark however had a constitutional preference for a stove-heated whiskey-scented air, and declared with an access of dignity that he had no secrets.

‘All right,’ said Paul. ‘My friend here is John Maidment, son of Wilfred Maidment.’

‘And why did not the old man come himself?’ asked the other with a plaintive drawl. ‘I hev been a good friend to the dook, and he’d a done better to hev come to his old friend fair and square and not have gone lounging off to a darned lawyer at the Springs.’

‘How do you know he has gone to the Springs?’ asked Paul quickly.

‘Oh, it’s a secret, is it?’ said Mr. Sark scornfully. ‘Well, I guess I know something,’ he added with pride. ‘I know the dook started clear out of Leadville a week since over

the Western Pass, and, if he ain't either dead or drunk, he is at Colorado Springs by now.'

By this time John had reached the limit of endurance. This reeking den filled him with disgust; the staring silent men in their slouched hats affected his nerves; the familiarity of Mr. Sark made him sick. That this ruffian should speak with an air of patronage of John Maidment's father! And then there came back to him again the image of that father, and he felt the horror of his degradation and in the next moment the longing to secure him. He noted as a piece of luck that Paul had been put on the track of Wilfred Maidment without any hint from him; he had only to find a reason for putting off his journey to England and going back again with his friend over the Western Pass; they could not fail to find his father. Meanwhile this place was un-

endurable; he felt that no further good would come of the interview; he loathed this festive company. He pulled Paul's coatsleeve, and Paul, quite ready to come to the point with the fewest words needful, came a step nearer to Mr. Sark and said, 'It's a plain matter; you know as well as I know that you have no claim on the mine.'

'What?' shrieked Mr. Sark, as if somebody had flicked him with a whip; and the sympathetic Garbets, who was sitting in a heap in a corner, uttered a note of scorn.

'But my friend here,' continued Paul, 'thinks it hard luck for you to have been so near to a good thing and to have lost it; and so, if you will just write on a bit of paper that you have no claim whatever on the mine, he will promise you in his father's name two thousand dollars.'

‘Two thousand dollars! Two thousand dollars for what will be worth two millions! Why, you——’

Here Mr. Sark became speechless from excess of emotion ; he was choked with wrath, and grew purple and danced upon the floor, until at last the pent-up agony found expression in an intricate web of blasphemies, so various and so rich in colour, that it is doubtful if the most hardened sinner present had ever heard the like.

At last it was finished, and Paul said with even more coldness, ‘That’s the offer ; you can take it or leave it.’

‘And it is this blank, blank Tenderfoot—this son of that soaked old fraud and darned deadbeat Wilf Maidment who——’

Mr. Sark paused, feeling perhaps that any words were poor after his late magnificent

outburst, but he had said enough to make silence no longer possible for John. He ground his teeth, but the word 'scoundrel' seemed to force its way through and sounded with startling distinctness.

'What?' barked Sark with a bound.

"'Scoundrel!' he said," cried out Paul, and in the same moment he knocked Mr. Sark down, and following his blow threw himself upon him and grasped his right arm with all his force till he felt the muscle grow limp. An awful flow of curses broke from the fallen man, whose arm was bent under him, while Paul forced him on to his face and took from his white fingers the pistol which they had grasped in the quick moment before the blow.

Sam Hall had stepped past John, and stood with a grim smile waiting for further



events ; but nobody seemed eager to carry on the game. Mr. Garbets confined himself to incoherent curses, singing second as it were to his accomplished chief ; the other men present scarcely changed their positions. Indeed, the great Sark was not a popular man, and such respect as he commanded was solely due to his reputation with the revolver.

‘Paul has been there before,’ said Sam Hall to John, when it was clear that the incident was finished.

‘What did the villain want ?’ asked John in much excitement ; ‘what did he mean to do ?’

‘I guess he meant to kill you for calling names, and he would have done it in about half a minute if our friend had not got there first.’

## CHAPTER XXIX.

CERTAINLY Paul Brent and his comrades retreated with the honours of war; and Paul himself, like a Homeric hero, bore from the field of battle the arms of the fallen foe. Unlike the heroes of that child-like age, he neither boasted himself exultant nor adorned himself with the spoils; he shoved the revolver into his trousers pocket and strode home with grave thoughts. John hurrying beside him was in a fever of excitement. He could scarcely yet realise the meaning of the quick struggle which he had seen—could scarcely yet believe that, instead of walking and breathing there with the hot blood ting-

ling in him from head to heel, he might be lying cold and feeling nothing. Excitement after excitement had come to him in the last few days, but this last swallowed up them all for the time being—that he had been cheek by jowl with death. Was it really so near? Paul laughed it off; but Sam Hall let John know that Paul had seen Sark's hand move for the pistol-pocket in his rear, and on that sign had struck. Hall thought it well that this elegant young stranger should know that he owed his life to his friend—that, had Paul's arm been less quick or a yard farther from Mr. Sark's head, John Maidment's eloquent tongue had wagged its last on earth. It ceased to move now, for awe fell on John and he was glad to walk forward in silence and to know that he was alive.

When they had reached the hotel, he

followed Paul to his room, and there thanked him from a full heart. He spoke simply and truthfully, and the two men clasped hands with as simple trust and love as if they had been boys again. And then, since the easy gates of speech were open, John glided easily to that which had to be said. He declared that after all he could not leave Paul yet, but must go with him to find his father; if there were a divided duty, he was sure now that he must find his father before he went back to his wife; and he thought that, when he had found him, he had better take him away, as Paul had advised, from a place so full of peril. Paul cordially approved his friend's new decision; he was eager to bring father and son together, and to pack them both off safe to England; he had been considering, as he walked home, how many days would pass

before Mr. Sark would be able to use his right arm effectively ; he counted on a week, and hoped for more. And now, as John had slid so easily over this difficulty and was warmed by his friend's approval of his change of plan, he was inspired to pass without a pause to a half-confession. It seemed as if he were carried into it by quick-coming appropriate words ; and he found himself telling Paul that he had seen at the ranch, where he had slept on the way up, a poor broken man who had seemed strangely familiar to him, and that, since he had heard the poor account of his father, he had been haunted by the belief that that poor broken man was he. The danger through which he had passed, and the sudden inspiration to which he now yielded, brought a sob into John's voice, which touched an old chord in his friend. Paul had been pained

by the change in John, though he would not let his thoughts dwell upon it. His old belief in the infallibility of John Maidment was dead long ago with the glad confident morning of their boyhood, but it had left a great tenderness; and, as some gentle eyes will not bear to observe with a too curious scrutiny the lines which Time has writ upon a face once loved, so Paul turned his thoughts with a fine modesty from a deliberate criticism of his friend. It was enough to say that John looked ill, that he was not himself. And was it not natural that a man should look ill, harassed, almost old at times, who had travelled day and night from Mayfair to Leadville, from an offended wife to a disappointing father; who had heard without preparation the news of intoxicating fortune, and, with wealth almost in his hand, had been

within a second of death? John was not himself, Paul thought, and it was no wonder. But yet some warmth of sympathy had been wanting; and it was only now, when John confessed his fear that he had seen his father, and his voice broke in the confession, that Paul felt the deep joy of giving his sympathy in full measure. He did not say much, but he said more than he could have forced from his lips in his Oxford days, and they were good encouraging words. He declared that John's father would bloom in the old atmosphere to a new health and new habits of life; that it would be a glad day for his own father when he could welcome Wilfred Maidment again, and a real joy for him to be allowed to take charge of his old friend as often and for as long a time as John would allow.

John felt better, and would have gone on talking far into the night, but Paul would not. He had settled with Sam Hall, who seemed able to refuse him nothing, that the team should be ready at the first glimpse of light, for he wished by travelling from dawn to dark to reach the ranch in a single day.

It was a long day's journey and uneventful, and John, sitting silent in the buggy and staring at mile after mile of the familiar track, sank now and then into a sort of drowsy unbelief in the reality of these wonders, which he had heard and seen. Indeed he was tired; strange events and exciting air had robbed him of his proper sleep; he was oppressed by extraordinary periods of silence. But when they drew near to the low stone house, which he had left three days ago with such



strange feelings, his mind sprang up alert. In a few minutes he would see again the bare rough room where he had looked up across the narrow table and heard his father's name from those tremulous lips, which were his father's. Was he still there? In a few minutes he might see him again—in what condition? In a few minutes he might be trying with all his faculties to read in his father's face whether he remembered that he had told his name—whether he knew that he John Maidment, recognising his father, had gone away without a word. He was in an agony of doubt. In a minute they would meet. Perhaps his father, learning who he was, would know clearly that he had told him his name; perhaps he would not even see that this son of his was the same man to whom he had chatted so freely three days

ago. John could not be sure; it seemed as if these lagging horses would never reach that low-lying cluster of grey, dismal walls.

It was Paul who asked the question, and John who listened for the answer with an anxiety which was almost acute pain. The owner of the ranch, with his deliberate North-country manner, informed them that the dook was still there—that he had not yet felt strong enough to go on. He was glad to let him lie and to feed him as well as he could, but he strongly advised his removal to more luxurious quarters. He stated his belief that no woman had ever been in the house, and his suspicion that when a man was ill a woman might be useful; he seemed more certain that sheets and such things would alleviate a sick man's condition. It was clear enough from

his amiable but contemptuous manner of speaking of his guest that he had no suspicion that he had entertained a millionaire unawares. Indeed he too had come to this region not for his health's sake ; he had little leisure for listening to gossip, and, since this property of his lay far away from the common track to Leadville, small opportunities of hearing it.

Paul bent his head in the vacant doorway which united the centre room to the sleeping-den on the left, and John followed him with quaking heart. One glance was enough to show him that he need fear no vehement reproaches. His father lay on the same old dirty mattress, whereon he had left him so short a time ago, turning and going away with the unspoken hope in his heart that he should see his face no more. A few days had

passed and he was here again, peering by the uncertain light at the wan fallen face, trying to decide how weak he was and how much life was in him. He thought that the poor creature looked worse than when he saw him last, but this might be a mere ebb which a flow must follow ; and, as he looked, he was smitten suddenly with pity that he should be staring in this dismal place at a poor wretch sleeping like a tired tramp at home, and that this should be his father. He turned away with a sob and caught Paul's hand, and Paul wrung it with a painful pressure, for he could not speak. Paul was thinking of his own father far away in England, and the thought deprived him of speech ; that loyal gentleman at home had loved this man so well and been so firm a friend to him ; and here he lay, after all, a poor, weak, degraded creature, flung on

the floor like a bundle of greasy clothes. The young Englishman's eyes filled with unaccustomed tears as he looked at his father's friend.

On the next morning it became clear that Wilfred Maidment's only strength was in a perfect indifference to Fate. He looked at those new-comers who had watched him in his sleep, and did not seem to care a jot whether they came or went, spoke or were silent, left him on his mattress or carried him away. He was so weak that Paul gave him some brandy from John's flask, and this seemed to be a sufficient reason for the dook to repose entire confidence in Paul. He followed him gratefully with his watery eyes, and he feebly smiled acquiescence when he heard that he was to be carried down at once to Manitou; he was looking at his new

friend's pocket while he smiled, and he would have smiled no less amiably if the new friend had decreed that he should be taken post haste to Jericho.

So Paul busied himself with making as good a bed as he could in Sam Hall's buggy, and when everything was ready they brought out the poor gentleman and started down the trail at a foot's pace, Sam Hall driving with his feet on the pole and the two younger men walking ; and so they came in good time to Manitou, which was by some miles nearer than Colorado Springs. Manitou was beginning to have a little reputation for strengthening the delicate with its fine mountain air and its iron spring ; and besides a few small houses dotted on the slope there had sprung up a big brand-new wooden house, which was nothing less than a hotel with a piazza, a

supply of clean linen, a young clerk, and no mean show of the luxuries of hotel civilisation. There Paul, who had been obliged to repeat his doses of brandy two or three times on the journey, carried his charge to a bare clean bedroom on the second floor, washed him unresisting, and put him to bed in clean sheets. The feeling of the sheets seemed to carry Mr. Maidment back to other days; he began to cry silently, and looked at his attendant with beseeching eyes. But Paul would not comfort him with more alcohol; he only responded to the appeal by smoothing his pillow and his poor old faded hair, sitting patient and watchful till his charge had fallen asleep.

And now began a trying time for John Maidment. He had looked on Manitou as

but the first resting-place in the journey to England; but day followed day, and the invalid could not be moved. A woman had been found to look after him, but her duties were light, for he preferred to be nursed by Paul; and Paul gave almost all his time to him. He lay weak (it was a question if he did not grow a little weaker every day), but with a much more respectable air; for he was washed and brushed and tended with the nicest care, and in his calmer hours he looked like a model old gentleman lying patiently on the best mattress of the hotel and feeling the sheet tremulously with his thin nervous fingers. There were other times when he did not seem like a model old gentleman—times when he set himself coughing by the vehemence of his Rocky Mountain language, when he first shrieked and then whined for spirits, and



would not be comforted by those substitutes which the doctor provided.

The doctor, who had come to this lonely place for his own health, discovered a very interesting combination of maladies in the poor old patient ; but Sam Hall went to the root of the matter when he guessed that Mr. Maidment was just burnt up and worn out. When he was in a bad mood, nobody had any influence with him but Paul, and nobody had so bad an effect as his own son. Indeed at all times John's presence seemed harmful to his father ; and he was glad to keep away, for the sick man had an ill effect on him too. It seemed as if each could feel the presence of the other, as if some family element common to both overcharged the air of the sick-room. It is true that in his vaguer moments Wilfred Maidment seemed to for-

get that he had ever had a son ; but presently he would look at his son so shrewdly, that John felt as if he remembered clearly every detail of that unlucky evening at the ranch when he had known him and made no sign. Wilfred's calmness would give way to impatience ; and John would go away pale and unquiet to assure himself that his father was too ill to have any clear conception of what had passed between them. He walked about or tried to read, and wondered how long this state of things would last, and what would come of it. He was sorry for himself and sorry for his father too ; he was obliged to leave him to Paul ; and surely he could not distrust Paul.

## CHAPTER XXX.

SOMETIMES, when Mr. Maidment was alone with Paul and feeling comfortable, he would become sprightly. Then his topic was himself, and he would exhibit himself, as it were, against old backgrounds, which were stored away like theatrical properties in his musty old memory. He had belonged to exclusive clubs; he had moved in exclusive circles; he had been admired by delightful women. He looked at Paul doubtfully, as he babbled about the great houses wherein his elegant figure had moved, or hinted at successes with the fair; he watched

his sole auditor with doubt, and with a sort of plaintive prayer to be believed. He told the social stories which had gained him a name in the mountains and plenteous drinks withal. He had cared little whether his Western hearers had believed him or not; but now there had come to him a young Englishman, who must have seen or at least heard of these clubs and palaces, the desired Park and Piccadilly, and it seemed to the poor dook essential that his new friend should believe that he had been in his day a real swell.

The stories were true enough; but the poor story-teller could not rid himself of the haunting fear that to the initiated they must seem false. His wan old face and feeble eyes were always mutely appealing to Paul for an assurance that it did not seem impossible that he had been an arbiter of taste and a

man of fashion. As he hinted of his conquests, his trembling skinny fingers went in obedience to old habit to the faded wisp of moustache, and he simpered till he showed the gaps among his handsome teeth.

Paul used to blush as he pretended interest in those musty stories of the town; and he did some violence to his conscience when he pictured for the invalid a nice place in the country, which he should buy with some of his new wealth, and where he should entertain his friends of former days. ‘Only make haste to be strong,’ he said one day when Mr. Maidment’s gayest mood had been followed by a sudden depression; ‘only get strong, and we’ll take you to England and set you up with a house, and a place, and horses, and—and all that.’

The poor gentleman looked at him rather

strangely, and then looked at his hand, which was almost transparent against the light of the window. 'I should like a week in Paris,' he said, 'with lots of money. It's come too late—it's come too late,' and he began to cry.

Paul could not bear this sight. He got up from his chair beside the bed with a few incoherent words of consolation, and went and stared out of the window, waiting till the poor gentleman's snivelling should end in lethargy.

On this occasion however the patient's mind was strangely alert; the unusual thought of wealth so long desired, and now his own, had led to another thought at least as unusual. He called fretfully to the young man at the window, and Paul turning saw a faint colour in his cheek and agitation in his eyes and fingers.

‘I don’t see why,’ he said, ‘I shouldn’t pay my debts to your father.’ He had done with his crying, and now spoke with weak defiance, as if he were making a suggestion which could not but be combated as extravagant.

Paul was certainly astonished. It was no surprise to him that his father had lent Wilfred Maidment money; though, as was natural, his father and he had never spoken on the subject. But he was surprised that the idea of repayment should have been so clear to Mr. Maidment that it had found expression in words. He stared at his patient and could not tell what to say; he tried to decide how his father would have received such a suggestion.

The dook was irritated by this silence; he had grasped this idea, which charmed him by

its novelty, and he clung to it with obstinacy. He began to distress himself at this silence, which seemed like opposition. ‘They’re debts of honour,’ he said, ‘debts of honour—damme, man, you wouldn’t have me neglect my debts of honour!’

His voice went up into a quaver, and Paul to soothe him said that, if he owed his father anything, he could pay him of course.

‘If I owe him!’ cried Mr. Maidment; and he would not be pacified till he had told Paul of loan after loan which the Colonel had sent him since his first coming to America.

There were limits to the poor gentleman’s memory, even at this brilliant moment, as there are limits (or so the wise have said) to the confessions of every debtor; but, though no mention was made of money borrowed in the old days in England, and though without



doubt the list of the later loans was not complete, Paul was astonished at the amount which this improvident person had received from his old friend. The improvident person was pleased with the effect which he produced on his auditor, and to deepen the impression he insisted with delight in such business-like accuracy that Paul should write down the amounts from his dictation.

When this solemn business was ended, Mr. Maidment closed his eyes and lay with a smile of beatitude on his lips, content with his conduct, as if to make a list of debts were equivalent to their payment. But even now he did not remain in that passive state which seemed natural after this unwonted exercise of both conscience and memory. Yet another idea came to the surface. If Philip Brent had lent him money when he wanted

it, he would leave the money, which he had won at last, to Philip's son. He had never made a will, and the notion of making one filled him with pleasant excitement: it was a delightful novelty; it made him fully realise for the first time that he was a man of property. Between him and men of property (solemn and majestic title) there had always seemed a great gulf. Now the gulf was passed; he too was the sort of man who sends for his lawyer (the most respectable possession in the world) and makes a will. He was delighted; his eyes were wide open again, and feverishly bright when he announced to Paul that he proposed to leave him his fortune. 'A legacy or two,' he said, 'you won't mind; but all the residue of my fortune, of which I die possessed, mines or minerals, messuages, tenements, with their what-d'ye-

callems and thingamies, I leave and bequeath to my dear and valued friend Paul Brent, and—and the game is up, and *rien ne va plus*.'

He ended with vague mutterings, as if his great ideas had been too much for him. Paul went to him and patted his pillow.

'Never mind about wills and lawyers,' he said ; 'you must wait till you get to England ; that's the place for lawyers.'

'But I shan't get to England,' said Mr. Maidment fretfully, but yielding as usual to Paul's authoritative hand. 'I shan't get to England,' he muttered again sleepily ; and Paul looking down at the wasted face felt with an aching of the heart that the untold story of his father's noble friendship was to be ended here. And he had inherited, as it were, this loyal protecting friendship ; and it was as impossible for him to dally for a

moment with the idea of taking a penny of this fortune, which must come to John, as to go in search of his friend and filch the money from his pocket.

While Paul nursed his patient and listened to his prattle, when he was able to speak, John was growing daily more sick of silence and of idleness. For long hours he had nobody to talk to, and when he had written his budget of letters to England he had nothing to do. He had written to all those who ought to be prepared for the possible arrival of his dilapidated parent; he had written well of the hard life and rough companions which had broken the health and destroyed the beauty of the brilliant Wilfred Maidment. In his anxiety and solitude he had turned to his wife for sympathy, and his letter to her, which ignored their misunder-

standing, was eloquent of pity for his father and of affection for her.

It seemed an age before he could receive her answer, and confirm his expectation of her full acceptance of peace and oblivion, of her generous zeal to help and nurse her husband's father. Both to her and to his other correspondents he had hinted at the possibility of wealth ; but merely hinted, for here too was a gnawing anxiety. He did not dare to believe that all this money would be his. A silver mine among the topmost peaks of the Rocky Mountains seemed at moments impossible as the treasure of Aladdin ; and the more desirable for his career, the more unreal. And then among these wild men, of whom each carried half-a-dozen lives in a small pocket of his trowsers, it seemed to his excited fancy that a mine might be plundered

or held by force. He could not understand the calm confidence of Paul, who put the matter aside as if it were safe enough and of no immediate interest. He was only half convinced by Sam Hall's statement that wealth was safer in Leadville than in New York, and that offences against sacred property were a thousand times more sure of punishment than offences against life. But for this security every man must sit on his pile with a small battery beside him—and how then would work be done?

Sam Hall came up from Colorado Springs as often as he could, and his visits did John good; he was easy and confident, and brought the latest news of Mr. Sark. And Mr. Sark was another cause of recurring anxiety to John. Of course the man's claim was hollow; but who could be sure of justice

anywhere? Here in this region, where civilisation was but putting forth her first tentative buds, it seemed to John as if the vainest claim might be preferred. But Sam Hall treated with the largest contempt both the claim and the claimant. He generally had something to say about him.

One day he brought a report that Mr. Sark was collecting evidence of a supposed promise of Mr. Maidment that the profits of the hole in the ground, if any, should be shared between them; and John was not wholly reassured by Sam Hall's grave approval of the value of this testimony, on the ground that there was not one of these witnesses whose oath was not proof positive of the opposite.

On another day the air was electrified by the rumour that the great Sark was on the

war-path, breathing whiskey and horrid threats of vengeance, fortifying his spirit with ingenious masterpieces of intricate profanity. Sam Hall knew, as John did not know, that Paul had left behind him in Leadville a neat parcel containing Mr. Sark's revolver, having an inborn distaste for another man's property, and being of opinion that, if he were to be shot, he might as well be shot by this pistol as another. That Mr. Sark should go round without a shooting-iron was about as likely as that a game-cock would voluntarily leave his spurs at home. But Sam Hall was sceptical of more shooting, opining that the avenger would decide to leave their crowd alone ; and it was not long before he came with a grim smile at the fulfilment of his expectations, and the news that the enemy had climbed down. It is true



that the chief still held aloof, majestic in his wrath as Achilles ; but Mr. Garbetts had come to Mr. Hall on a diplomatic mission to find out if there was still a chance of that two thousand dollars. The diplomatist had been dismissed with contempt, and then at last the chief had appeared in person ; and John was vexed when Sam Hall told him that he had sent away the haughty Sark with small hope of the money. John did not rest until the two thousand dollars were paid, and he held a paper signed at the lawyer's office by Mr. Sark, who therein declared that he had not, nor had ever had any claim whatever on the mine of Mr. Wilfred Maidment. So Mr. Sark went on the drink for a week, and out of the ken of John Maidment, who was glad to think of him no more.

One cause of uneasiness was removed ; but

causes enough remained for John to review in his lonely walks and dismal hours of thinking. He was banished from his father's bedside, but his brief glimpses of the sick man and the daily reports kept him in a fever of anxiety. How long would he lie there? When could he be moved? Would he ever be moved? If the mine was his beyond all contention, and was as valuable as they said, would it all belong in time to him, John Maidment? He wanted it so much. If this great chance had never come near him, he would have done well (he rarely doubted that he would do well) without it; but now he had almost grasped a fortune, a fortune in his own control, a great sum of money to use as he thought fit. He felt that he must have it. He had shown people that he was eloquent and clever, and this money would make him a

man of weight. He who had all the talents must have these ten talents also, and he would be a leading man at once. Was he sure of this rich heritage? He was made nervous by his father's indifference, and carried as daily companion the constant fear that some part of this wealth, for which he thirsted, would be given away or left to somebody. When he could bear the fear no more in silence he asked Paul if it were not right that his father should make a will ; he spoke almost fiercely of his dislike of entering on this subject ; he felt that he ought to speak.

This day, on which John relieved his mind by speech, came not long after that on which Wilfred Maidment had expressed his wish to make a will in Paul's favour. Mr. Maidment seemed to have forgotten his wish, and Paul

had hoped that he should hear no more about it. Now he spoke on the subject with decision. He strongly advised John not to bother his father about a will ; he declared to him that it would be bad for his patient ; he told him shortly that, if his father died and left no will behind, all would go to his son, and that that was clearly the best arrangement. John was glad that he had spoken ; in a moment he was in a mood to be generous ; he expressed his conviction that his father ought to leave something to Paul's people. Though the subject was distasteful to him, he could not but say to Paul that his poor father had owed much—probably some money and certainly much kindness—to Colonel Brent. Paul looked at John with a frown of perplexity ; after a minute he took his old pocket-book out of his breast-pocket,

and took from the pocket-book a paper which he handed to John.

‘What’s this?’ asked John sharply, as he looked at the list of figures.

‘Your father made me write them down,’ Paul said; ‘he says he owes that to my father. When you come into your property, you can offer to pay my father. I think that is fair, and, because it’s fair, I think my father will take it.’

It would make a very small hole in John’s fortune, which was to be; but yet the sight of the figures annoyed him. ‘Did you know of this before?’ he asked crossly.

‘I guessed it,’ said Paul.

‘Why was I never told anything?’ asked John; it was a familiar line of complaint, and he grew hot as he spoke. ‘It was always the same thing; I was always treated as a child,

or a pauper brought up for charity's sake. How could I have borne that charity if I had known that all the time my father was draining him too?'

'Hush!' said Paul, with a look at the house.

They were so far away that, had John shouted his indignant questions, no hint of them could have reached the ears of the invalid; but yet Paul hated this talk of 'draining' almost as if it were a criticism of his own father. He was growing very tender towards the sick man, whom he had tended so firmly and gently. 'Don't talk about it,' he said: 'a friend who has must lend to a friend who wants—and you—perhaps you won't have to wait long before you can repay those things.'

The words almost stuck in his throat, so

loth was he to confess how weak the poor man was. But John was full of words, which still demanded utterance ; he declared that facts were not altered—that right was still right—that it was wrong that he should have been kept in the dark. He grew hotter and more emphatic as he felt the unspoken disapproval of the tall young man, who stood there stiff and with a little more colour growing visible in his tanned cheek. John was exasperated : he remembered with exceeding bitterness how he had mentally criticised his guardian the Colonel for this or that use of his money, for this or that economy ; and how he had always assured himself that his own bringing up was but a small return on the Colonel's part for all the benefit which he had derived from the friendship of the brilliant Wilfred Maidment.

Truly the facts were not altered : the fact was that during all those years, in which Colonel Brent had been paying for John at school and at college and even when he was a Member of Parliament, he had been sending sums of money across the sea to be wasted in speculation or imbibed in whiskey by John's father. And John had not been told, and this was the only aspect of the affair which enabled him to pour forth his deep and effervescing vexation. He was indignant with this old Brent silence, of which he felt that he had always been the victim ; and Paul, erect and speechless in the sunshine, seemed to him the last and not the least annoying embodiment of that incomparable silence.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

No eyes, however kind, could long refuse to see that Wilfrid Maidment grew weaker. The American sun was hotter with every day, burning so far away in the wide-arching cloudless sky, and pouring down its beams of fire through the clear cold air ; but for all its heat it could not give new life to the exhausted man. Without words it came to be understood by all that he would never see again the valley mists and green soft hedges of England. He did not even wish to move. His restless moods were fewer ; even the craving for stimulants which had possessed

him now and then lost strength, as he lost lost strength. He talked less and less, and seemed content to lie dozing or musing with open eyes, quiet in his bed. From the first this clean bed had been so sweet to him, that when Paul lifted him from it that it might be aired and made afresh, he had been always irritable and anxious, till the same strong arms had put him back into the sheets. Clean sheets were a fine luxury, and the greatest of luxuries was rest. Perhaps lying there with the open eyes staring at the ceiling, he wondered why he had treated himself to so little of this inexpensive repose: he had always been an idle man, and had never found time to rest; it must have seemed strange to him. But he had had some fun in his day. It was certain that he remembered sometimes how well he had amused himself; for Paul

sitting silent by the window heard now and then a feeble chuckle, which moved his pity more than tears could move it.

One evening Paul, who had been in the sick man's room almost all day, seeing his patient calm and still as the evening, and as indifferent, or so it seemed, to all the troubles of humanity, determined to treat himself to a good night's rest in a fresh room. He saw that everything which the poor man could need was in its place; and when he had seen the nurse established he went away and shut himself in alone and slept. He slept so well that he did not wake till the knocking on his door had grown loud; and then he leapt from the bed, and going softly to the door heard from the nurse that Mr. Maidment was restless and

talking wildly, and that she could not quiet him.

After a few minutes Paul was in his patient's room, and by the faint light which was burning, he saw him moving his head on the pillow and muttering like one in a perplexing dream. Paul bent low over the pillow, and when he raised his head he told the nurse to go for John. A change had come in the sick man which might mean much, and it was right that his son should be there. Now and then his murmurs rose into anxious words, and Paul standing silent in the stillness could hear him complain. 'We shall be late,' he said; 'she will have gone; how do I look? Am I all right?' He said the words again and again, till they sank into a sort of sing-song, and then he cried out again with sharp anxiety, 'Am I

all right? Is my tie straight?' Then he laughed feebly—'Ha, ha, ha, la poverina! Does she admire me so much? No, no, no, Carina mia. What will he say? Where is he? Why doesn't he come? How slow he is! There never was anybody so slow. I'm in a devil of a scrape; he always comes when I'm in a scrape—devil of a scrape. Why don't he come?'

'Father!' said John softly, and with a voice full of feeling. He had come in very quietly and gone noiselessly to Paul, who had grasped his hand and given place to him.

'Who are you?' cried out the sick man; 'who the devil are you? You're a dun; I know you. Take him away. Philip, why don't you pay him and let him go? Philip!'

Paul started at the sound of his father's name. He had pulled John back into the darkness; for the sick man had made a vain effort to rise as he stared at his son. John turned away with a groan, and his father's voice fell again, calling faintly to the friend of his youth, 'Philip, why don't you come to help me?'

Paul could not speak at the moment; this cry to his father seemed to wring his heart; he could only stand by the pillow and lay his large hand on the worn forehead. The touch was enough.

'Ah! ah! yes,' the sick man said, 'I knew you'd come. God bless you, Philip—dear old Philip—God bless you, Phil!'

To be called to by his father's name sent a strange thrill through Paul's young blood. He tried to speak, but he could only mutter

soothing incoherent words, as he smoothed the pillow and began to tuck in the disordered blankets. The patient submitted quietly, but he spoke again presently in a surprised tone like a child's: 'But I haven't said my prayers yet,' he said.

God knows to what far day of childhood the poor dook had wandered back. Paul's soothing words were to him the words of the nurse, who had helped to spoil the beautiful child some fifty years ago; and the hands which tucked him in were her hands, which had been motionless almost as long. Paul knelt by the bedside, and repeated the prayer which he had learned, as the poor dook had learned it, at his mother's knee; and when he had finished, the dying man said softly for Amen—'God bless you, Phil!'

Paul dropped his face upon the blanket with

a sob, and the thin hand moved feebly as if it would touch his hair. It was the dook's last movement, as the name of the loyal friend, who was so far away, was his last word.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

ONE afternoon, some fifteen months or more after Wilfred Maidment's death, Colonel Brent stood erect with his daughter and his eldest son beside him, and looked away across his beloved land. Only a week had gone since he had come back to Brentholme, and his heart had not yet tired of giving silent thanks. Paul stood silent beside his father, and Letty had stopped her talking to her brother, hushed by the peaceful beauty of the scene. It was a September afternoon; it seemed the hush of the year. In the bottom of the valley, where the tiny river

wound, the night's mist had never wholly gone ; a drowsy air hung on the valley trees, and the smoke moved upward slowly. But on the broad spaces of the park, which lay towards the south and west, the sunshine had spread itself like a garment ; the rabbits had crept out on the sunny side of every copse, and a covey of partridges lay quiet on the grass. Where there was an upper growth of coarser grass, it was almost as yellow as the stubble in the fields below ; the elms were flecked with yellow and the beeches tinged with bronze. Over all—over the whole English country of valley and sloping field and free far-rolling down—was a great stillness, in which it seemed that one might hear the downfall of the withered leaf. So listening one heard the distant twittering of birds, who had gathered in their autumn companies ;

from far across the valley the bark of a dog came with a strange distinctness, the crowing of a cock, the echo of a distant gun. The perfect stillness, the familiar beauty of the well-loved place, the thought that they were together and at home filled the father and his children with a content too deep for words, and a sympathy as deep as the content. In the girl's eyes at least there was a moisture not far from tears.

They had had a wonderful week, but now they had done with the strangeness of the familiar things ; they had packed off the boys to school ; and on this afternoon, for the first time, they seemed to have leisure to stand and look, and to feel that they had come home again. The boys had been an exciting element. They had hung on the heels of their brother from the West, and pestered him with

questions ; he had come back to them like a hero from a book of Ballantyne—their own brother and a hero from a book of Ballantyne. They got few romantic tales from Paul, who preferred to tell them of hardships and monotony ; but in spite of this there was a disagreement between Jacky and Teddy as to which of the two was more fit for the work of a cow-boy. It was arranged that Jacky should go to Montana after the next holidays, and see for himself how he liked it. Dicky was to go into the navy, and not even dreams of revolvers and riding all day long could win him for more than a few hours from his longing for a life at sea.

Paul had promised to take Jacky to the West, for he had made up his mind to keep his interest in the ranch. He had suffered from a great disappointment. His only object

in going into the cattle business had been to win enough money to make the letting of Brentholme no longer necessary ; he had prospered with his beasts ; he had been very lucky in his partner ; he had looked forward through toilsome days and lonely evenings to the time when he should lead his father home. Now he stood by his father again in the familiar place, but it was no money of his which had brought the thing to pass. He did not wish that his father's return had been delayed till his profits had grown greater ; he had scarce room for anything but joy that Brentholme was freed from the stranger ; yet it had been a great disappointment. He confessed this to Letty, as he would not have confessed it in former days ; but he never told it to the Colonel. John Maidment had paid his father's debt, and Colonel Brent had accepted

the payment. He had decided that he could not with justice refuse this payment. John with eager words had spoken of interest for the loans and of compensation for his own bringing-up, for which he declared a passionate gratitude ; but his guardian had become portentously silent, and a great wave of colour had come into his face. His lips had locked themselves so tight, that it had seemed to John that they would never let out a word again ; and when John having left this silent man appealed to Paul, Paul told him frankly that he must speak no more on the subject—that it would have been better if he had not spoken about it at all.

Though the money which John paid to Colonel Brent made the return to Brent-holme easy, it made no great hole in the young man's new fortune. The mine had

been sold in Boston for a large sum ; it is a good mine, and, unlike some silver mines, has been profitable to others besides the promoters of the company. It is a good mine, but nevertheless John was glad to be out of it ; an atmosphere of insecurity seemed to float on the Leadville of his memory. He brought home a large sum to invest in more familiar things ; he too was a man with a stake in the country. The very first use which he made of his money was to pay Colonel Brent ; and in less than a year the tenant of Brentholme made way for the family. No time was lost in repairs or adornment, and after a few days of vigorous cleaning and airing the Colonel was walking up and down the worn pathway in his study carpet, where his father had walked before him. He would have liked to keep Paul for ever by his side ;

but Paul would not, without necessity put such strict limits to his life. He had gone into cattle-raising with a single purpose, and had been disappointed; but he was now interested in it for itself, for the wider horizon, for the air of the plains, for the responsibility and the chances of decision and prompt action.

At home there was no work ready to his hand. His father was one of those who manage their own affairs. His zeal for a political life had passed away. He had turned with distaste from politics when John consented to stand for the family borough, and the distaste had not passed away. Much which he had seen, and more which he had heard in America, had weakened his faith in politicians and in political prescriptions for curing the sins and sufferings of



mankind. He had thought much for himself in the long solitary hours. To sit silent in Parliament and to vote for the measures, sometimes but blundering compromises, of a party, tempted him as little as a life of race-meetings, or an annual round of country-house visits. A great extension of the franchise was imminent, and he was curious to see how strong the attack on the landlords of the country would be. He hoped with all his heart that in his father's day the coming change would not be great; but still it was no bad thing for the family to have some other form of property than English land. And so there were sufficient reasons which seemed good to Paul why he should stick to the ranch. He had borne the chief burden of its first toilsome days, and now he could leave it for long periods to his

partner, whom he could trust as himself. But he meant to go often to his beasts and to the other life, of which they were a part, and he had consented to take his brother Jacky, that he too might see for himself if that manner of life were to his taste.

The calm of that September afternoon preceded an event which filled the Colonel, Paul, and Letty, when any one of them thought of it, with something like alarm. They were so happy together; it seemed a pity that they could not have one more of these most lovely autumn days for their own pleasure only. The Colonel put up his chin with a sudden movement, and asked gruffly when John's train was due.

John Maidment was coming to make them a visit with his wife and his baby boy, a nurse, a maid and a man; and Letty all

the morning had been putting fresh flowers in the rooms, and wishing perhaps that the clean chintzes were not quite so faded. Still she had whistled as she moved about, and even sung a scrap or two of song, for she was so glad to be pushing about the old furniture in the old rooms. To be at home was joy enough for her, but it was a still greater joy to see Paul there. She smiled whenever she looked at him, even whenever she thought of him; she told him a great many things, but she did not tell him how great her curiosity was to see John Maidment's wife.

When John Maidment's wife arrived Letty soon decided that she was to be liked. She arrived with her wonderful baby and her suite of attendants, and her husband, who looked a little bored and a little uncom-

fortable. She was in great force ; she was effusive and emphatic, and she lost no time in proclaiming her love of the Brent family and of their home. She was immensely pleased with everybody and everything, and with Letty most of all.

On the very first evening after dinner, when they had left the men with their wine, she declared to the girl that she could not imagine how John had grown up in the same house with her without being desperately in love with her.

Letty blushed, though she had not such a gift of blushing as her male relations, and laughed till Lady Gertrude looked at her with surprise. She could laugh at all that ; she was glad that she could laugh at all talk of love ; she thought that she had left all

that a thousand years away, and that she should never look at any other young man, when her brother, the best brother in the world, was near. She was thankful that this impulsive lady had not made her embarrassing remark at dinner.

Lady Gertrude thought Letty all the more charming for her blushes and her laughter, and she promptly conferred upon her the highest honour, which however she conferred rather liberally on an ungrateful world; she swept her away upstairs to see her baby. Indeed Lady Gertrude was so largely happy, that her philanthropic heart wished that everyone might have a share. She had been very unhappy during her husband's absence in America; she had passed quickly, so soon as she realised that he had gone, from offended dignity to

passionate remorse. When she received the affectionate letter, in which he told her of his father's illness, and read in it no word of rebuke, she had been ready to swear that her husband had the finest nature in the world. When he came home she had rushed into his arms with incoherent confessions of wickedness, and had sobbed upon his shoulder till he almost staggered under her emotion.

She had found John very kind and affectionate ; for indeed he felt rather buffeted and bruised, and found this bounteous gift of love and admiration very much to his taste. And the admiration seemed to last as well as the love, and to admit of as little question. She put him up on a pedestal much higher than that which he had occupied in the first year of their marriage ; and if she ever doubted his perfection, she gave nobody a

right to suspect it, expect perhaps by a too eager and too defiant assertion of his absolute wisdom and goodness. Indeed she had found a formula which explained all things to her satisfaction. If anything looked like a blemish, it merely proved that John was a man of genius. The nerves and the tempers of men of genius were not to be judged by the same rules as the nerves and tempers of common men. She was the wife of a man of genius ; his genius required no proof ; everybody was beginning to admit it. Indeed it is a fact that when John had come back from the wilds with a fortune instead of a father, there was much more talk of his extraordinary ability ; and to say that all the world were talking of his talents was a pardonable exaggeration in a wife. Lady Gertrude bragged of her husband ; and then, as a crown

of her triumphant happiness, her son was born, and she bragged of her baby. Letty loved her for her enthusiasm and generosity; and she on her side proclaimed that Letty was the sweetest girl that ever lived, and was mightily indignant when Paul laughed.

John was not so comfortable at Brent-holme as his wife. The place was too full of memories, which his quick mind could not avoid; and his head was too full of politics, about which he could not speak. He was still member for that moribund little borough at the gates, and, whenever he thought of that fact, he fancied that Paul's clear eyes observed him with disapproval. He could not expatiate on men and measures to these taciturn folk, and he was thinking so much of the future of parties, that the silence was almost a pain in the jaws. He was obliged



to go away alone, to walk quick, and to mutter convincing arguments and fragments of denunciation. The fragments of denunciation were directed against the Tory party, some members of which had been trying on some of the newest Liberal clothes ; for John had clean forgotten that he had ever thought it possible that he might become a Conservative. Master of a fine fortune of his own, he felt independent for ever of all Boucherett influence, and less sensitive to the coolness of Liberal leaders. Moreover this coolness was a thing of the past ; the chiefs of the party had been uncommonly civil ; perhaps in the ears of even these exalted persons eloquence has a richer sound when it is not the eloquence alone which is golden. This young man could afford to be independent ; he was undeniably clever ; and he had money to spend. John

had responded to the advances of his leaders with frankness and with grace. He was confident that the extension of the franchise would be followed by a decisive Liberal victory at the polls. He was equally confident that, whatever the ingredients of the next Liberal Cabinet might be, it was the Radical section of the party which was the growing power. He was ready to throw in his lot with the Radicals ; he had no doubt that he, with his full pocket and reputation for speaking, would be sought by more than one of the new constituencies ; he meant to choose one where bold opinions and yet bolder language would meet with the fullest sympathy. He remembered the fine flights of his Radical eloquence in the Oxford Union ; he longed for the applause of the crowd and the long roll of the sonorous peroration.

With burning thoughts kept under and with rising words pressed down, it is no wonder that John Maidment was uneasy in the quiet autumn days and with these quiet people. It seemed as if Nature herself had become a member of the Brent family. John was eager for the fray and eager to show his value as a combatant—eager too of course to contribute to the welfare of the people. He would have flashed into wrath had anyone said that he was less zealous for the good of the nation or of mankind than in the effervescing Oxford days; but perhaps he would have admitted that he saw more clearly the necessity of belonging to a party and of rising high in its ranks. It was for the good of the nation that he should rise to power; it was but natural that at present he should be mainly occupied with the study of means of rising

His mind was busy with programmes and with compromises; he wanted the society of those whose minds were busy with these same affairs; he felt a restless desire to discuss, to persuade, to speak. At Brentholme he went about with a gag in his mouth, until at last in desperation he began to follow his wife to her room, and to pour forth his views and his expectations half to her and half to the window or the ceiling.

Lady Gertrude listened with bountiful admiration, and gave to him almost as much attention as to the baby. To her Boucherett ears some of his talk sounded wild; but she reminded herself that he was a man of genius, and her philanthropic heart was almost ready to believe that, if her husband had his way, the capitalist would lie down with the workman and the Golden age return. Per-

haps to the young mother, looking in the face of the first-born, the Golden age was come.

‘We ought to get away,’ said John; ‘I ought to be where I can talk it over and get at the real moves which are to be made. Here there’s not a soul to whom I can speak about these things.’

The end of this speech was not quite agreeable to Lady Gertrude; but so placid was she and so full of admiration, that she made no comment on it save by the smallest sigh, and a hardly perceptible wriggle of the shoulders.

‘Of course, darling,’ she said, ‘it is very annoying for you. Of course the Brents would not understand you if you talked to them.’

‘Oh, there’s nothing that’s hard to under-

stand,' cried out John impatiently; 'it isn't that, and the Brents aren't fools.'

'Well, then, why——' began Lady Gertrude, but her tone had vexed him, and he broke out impetuously:

'I do wish you wouldn't talk of the Brents as if they were wanting. They are extraordinary people, and it's silly not to see it. Paul saved my life for one thing. Paul is one in a thousand; he would face any danger, any death for his friend, or his family, or his country—or for mere duty. I tell you that Paul is a wonderful fellow; I tell you I sometimes feel small beside him and think him much better than I.'

'Oh, John,' cried his wife, 'how ridiculous! You know how I like the Brents! They are so nice and natural, but there are thousands of people like that. Of course

they are brave and good and all that, but so are lots of Englishmen. There is only one John Maidment.'

John laughed and touched her lightly on the cheek. He laughed, as if her words were absurd, but he liked their sound—'There is only one John Maidment.'

THE END.





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